

How Coaching Is Used in Organizations

Three Paths to Productivity

By Madeleine Homan, MCC, and Linda Miller, MCC

Nineteen years in coaching, and we are still asked: “Are you a life coach or an executive coach?” The answer, of course, is: “Yes.”

Yes, we coach executives and leaders in organizations, and yes, they have lives. Our coaching clients have one “self” and they bring that self to work every day. Who they are at work is who they are in their car, in their home, and at the beach, regardless of how hard they may work to modulate their behaviors.

Coaching is not only widely accepted by individuals in organizations but it is also the most popular method of developing people skills. As organizations embrace coaching, HR and OD professionals as well as managers and leaders are starting to provide coaching to others, because coaching helps people:

- Set clear and compelling goals
- Raise awareness regarding what actions and behaviors in achieving those goals
- Make actionable plans and stay accountable to them

Two key criteria help identify how coaching is best used inside organizations:

- The focus for the coaching
- The level of urgency for needed change

Depending on the focus and urgency, these criteria point us to three distinct ways that coaching is used in organizations:

- Performance
- Development
- Career

PERFORMANCE

Coaching to improve or increase performance usually includes an urgent need. For example, often bad behavior needs to stop or a new behavior must be ramped up in a compressed time frame for a job role. In both scenarios, it is critical that a manager (or an HR representative) be involved to refine the goals and focus for performance coaching.

In the case of problem behavior, there needs to be a documented message to the individual about what is at stake. The individual receiving coaching must have clarity about what he or she stands to lose or gain by accepting the influence of a coach and by making specific change. In other words, the consequences must be spelled out.

DEVELOPMENT

On the other hand, when coaching for development, the results are important but not necessarily critical or urgent for the current job. The individual has the opportunity to take a step back and think about where his skills and passion serve the greatest need in the environment. The person being coached for development has the luxury of knowing that everything is fine for now, while encouraging the person to examine what is needed next in his or her development. The coach can tap into aspirations and help to shape a plan that leads in the right direction for short-term and long-term leverage.

CAREER

Coaching conversations regarding career development can take place with one’s manager or with an HR professional who has coaching skills. Often managers feel ill equipped to be useful for this type of coaching, unless they have a long track record of building their own careers and feel qualified as a mentor (with ample industry experience) as well as a coach.

Career conversations provide the individual with a compelling long-term vision that aids short-term planning. A compelling long-term vision provides contextual support and motivation to those who may need to “pay their dues” on the journey to their dream job. These conversations will include questions about long-term life planning, dreams, and potential aptitude, as well as existing ones.

For managers who are being called on to coach, it is important to make the distinctions between these different focus areas for coaching. The most advantageous kind of coaching for managers is development coaching, and it is important to keep in mind that this type of coaching may overlap with performance and career coaching.

Working with the individual being coached to maintain clarity of focus will yield a satisfying coaching experience all around and will benefit both the individual and the organization.



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