

Rapid Skill-BUILDER® Coaching



Coaching is not a specialist occupation reserved for the few, but a vital way of operating for those who are trying to bring out the best in their people. It is a key skill which will help you to develop others.

While the idea of coaching is relatively new in commercial or business organisations, it's been around for a long time. Both sporting teams and top sports people like golfers and tennis players have coaches to help them improve as they strive to be the best. Coaches are even used in the arts, to help build skills in areas such as singing, dancing or drama.

No matter what field coaches operate in, their role is to provide feedback about performance and help others plan their development, in order to improve and be the best they can be. This Skill Builder looks at what you can do to improve your coaching effectiveness.

▼ Recognise

Recognising Your Coaching Style

Before you can really be effective as a coach, you need to have an understanding of your own style and how that can help or hinder the coaching process.

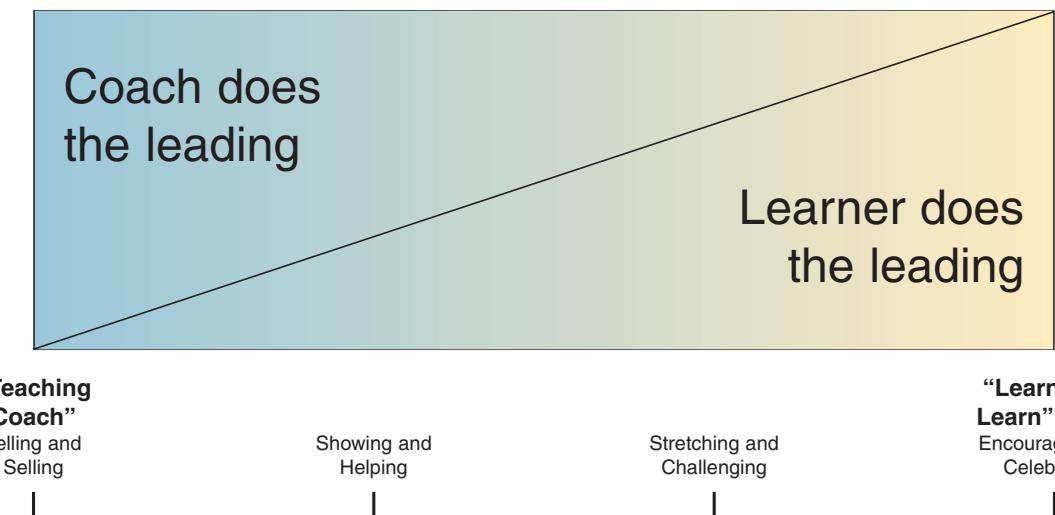
All of us have a natural or preferred coaching style. You need to understand your style as well as which situations it will be most suited to so that, as a coach, you can learn to adapt your style to the needs of the person you are coaching. To develop a good understanding of your style, it's helpful to consider the extremes.

At one end of the coaching continuum illustrated below is the "Teaching" coach. This type of coach does a lot of "telling" – he or she has the expertise and is trying to pass it on in order to help the other person achieve something concrete. These coaches draw on their experience to pass on the skills and knowledge the other person needs to do the job. This sort of coaching is appropriate when tasks are to be performed in the "right" way over and over. It's often most appropriate for people who are in front-line jobs where they have to achieve a consistent and predictable outcome in providing a product or a service.

At the other end of the scale is the "Learning to Learn" coach. This type of coach is more interested in asking questions and listening rather than in telling. Instead of hands-on technical experience, the "Learning to Learn" coach has a broader expertise. These coaches typically recognise the potential in people and have a commitment to giving them challenges and opportunities to stretch themselves and "learn how to learn". This sort of coaching is appropriate when there are many paths to a good result rather than just one "right" approach. It's particularly helpful when people are developing as managers or working on projects where they are breaking new ground.

At different times you can find yourself at different places on the "Coaching Continuum." As long as the coaching style you are adopting suits the situation (the person and the task), learning will be maximised. If the style you are using does not match what the situation demands, however, there will be problems.

Coaching Continuum



Formal or Informal?

Informal coaching can take place almost anywhere, **as long as you can give the person you are coaching your undivided attention – even for a very short time.** These days, the pace of work makes it difficult to schedule formal coaching sessions. Therefore, coaches need to take every opportunity to coach “on the run”.

You'll be amazed at how often you can create impromptu coaching sessions. The conversations you have with people in the lunchroom, in corridors and even in the parking lot can all be turned into informal coaching sessions.

One organisation has the philosophy that any conversation lasting longer than ten seconds is coaching.

If a conversation is short and instructional and does not seek to modify long-term thinking or action, it would not be considered as coaching. **However, if you take time to listen and to explain, coaching can be given and received.**

A good place to start is to encourage the person you are aiming to coach to “drop in” on you. This means that you will not be doing all the work in setting up coaching opportunities. The person you're coaching will also feel that it's more of a partnership, knowing he or she can come to you anytime without being invited.

Of course, you can't just rely on informal coaching. If you're serious about helping the people you work with, you must make time for more formal coaching sessions. These might be sessions where you review performance and progress, set new targets and goals, design formal development plans or even explore career options for the future.

Whenever you're coaching, even if you only have a few minutes, you need to be able to create a quiet, reflective space without distractions and interruptions. This is important because attention and focus is a critical foundation upon which good coaching is built. Your challenge as a coach is to find quiet, quality time – not just when you control the situation in the privacy of your office or a meeting room, but also when you don't. For example, this might be when the coaching happens in a more open and public environment.

If you can't create an appropriate space, you need to think seriously about deferring the coaching intervention or making a move to a better place. Trying to coach when there are distractions and absolutely no privacy is virtually impossible because one or both of you won't have your mind on the task.



▼ Read

Personality Types and Coaching

When you attempt to coach somebody, it is critical that you ensure you are communicating in a way which helps the other person. Experience tells us that some people are extroverted and really like to talk. They enjoy meetings where they can throw ideas around with other people and are happy to talk about their own ideas, even if those ideas are still in "first draft" stage. Introverts may find talking with extroverts difficult, view it as being "all over the place", or think that the conversation is too intangible, because they don't understand that extroverts "think out loud".

Introverts are energised by quiet time away from other people where they can get their ideas into good shape and sort them through before discussing them with others. Extroverts may incorrectly think that introverts are not really interested in what is being discussed, because they are likely to be less outwardly responsive.

Understanding your own preference for being introverted or extroverted, and reading that of the person you are coaching, will help you to purposefully match your style to meet the person's communication needs more effectively.



The Role of Trust

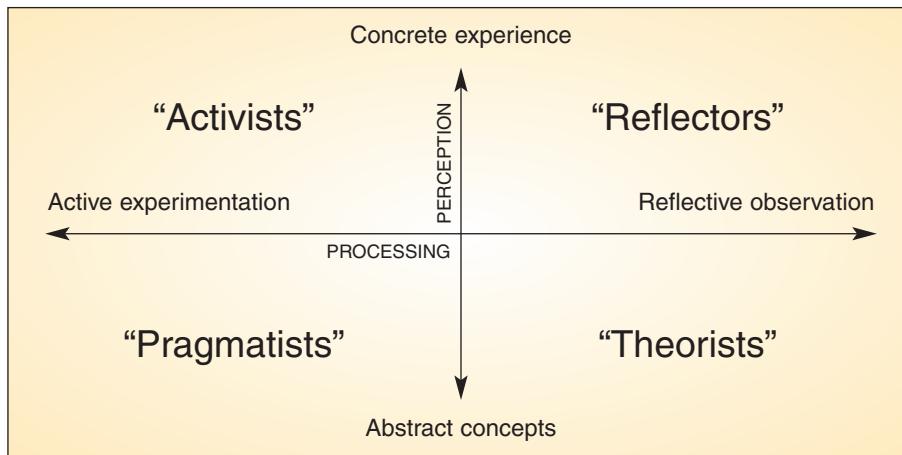
Trust is a key ingredient in coaching. It takes time to build and can evaporate in seconds. The person you are coaching will be watching and listening in order to determine if you are worthy of their trust. Anything that indicates you are unworthy of their confidence will adversely affect your coaching relationship.

Leaping in to help when the person does not want help can be a certain method of destroying trust. Especially if they feel that you are "putting them down" or that any disclosures they make will result in a "black mark" against them. Looking for signs that tell you when it is okay to help are important. Checking that you have understood accurately is even more important. Just asking some questions which allow the person to invite you to help is a simple way of opening up communication.

The Influence of Learning Styles

Having a basic understanding of learning styles will help you be a more effective coach. Very broadly, learning styles theory looks at how people both perceive and process information.

There are four main learning styles which result from the intersection of two axes. These are shown in the model on the following page. The vertical axis (perception) looks at a person's preference for taking in information and ranges from relying on concrete experience (through their five senses) through to abstract or theoretical thinking. The next step, which is how the person prefers to process the information, is represented by the horizontal axis and ranges from observing (watching) through to doing (actively experimenting).



This model is based on the work of David Kolb as well as Honey and Mumford

Reading the descriptions below and using these to help you understand the preferred style of the person you are coaching will help you to support their learning in the most effective way.

Activists like new experiences. They learn best when there is activity involved, experiencing problems and opportunities, working with others in business games, team tasks, role-playing or being “thrown in the deep end” with a difficult task. They will find long lectures, explanations, reading, learning alone and following detailed instructions less comfortable.

Reflectors like to collect data and think about it carefully. They will learn best by observing individuals or groups at work, reviewing and thinking about what they have observed in order to get a sense of context. They will find acting as leader or role-playing in front of others, doing things with no time to prepare, being “thrown in the deep end”, rushed or worried by deadlines difficult.

Theorists think problems through step-by-step. They learn best by using their skills and knowledge, when in structured situations with clear purpose, when they are offered interesting ideas or concepts even if they are not immediately relevant, or when they have the chance to probe and ask questions. Theorists will find it harder to learn in situations where emotions, feelings or subjective judgments are emphasised, when unstructured activities are used or briefing is poor, or if they have to do things without knowing the principles or concepts involved.

Pragmatists are keen to try things out to see if they work in practice. They learn best when there is an obvious link between the topic and their job and when they have the chance to try out techniques with feedback, e.g., role-playing. Techniques with obvious benefits (in timesaving for example) will also be popular with pragmatists. They find it difficult to learn when there is no immediate benefit that they can recognise, no practice or guidelines on how to do it, or situations where the instruction is all about theory.

If you are unsure of whether the person is a certain style, ask! Questions about how they like to learn or what situations they find difficult will help. Alternatively, you could have them complete a Learning Style assessment.

To help the person learn, start by using the style that is most comfortable for them. However, to help them get the most from the learning opportunity, it is best to follow up by taking them through the situation or subject using methods from the other styles as well. This will help develop their **ability to learn**.

▼ Receive

Responding to Cues

Building a successful coaching relationship involves evaluating and acting on the visual and verbal cues and other feedback you receive.

For example, if the person you are coaching appears anxious, it is important that you find out why. Gently probe to discover the reasons they are feeling this way by asking open questions that encourage the other person to share their concerns.

By carefully questioning and then listening to the responses you receive, you will be able to discover what is bothering or inhibiting them. It may be that you can then help them work through those issues. In situations like this avoid just telling the person that everything will be fine. This rarely works as a way of allaying fears or concerns.

Building Rapport

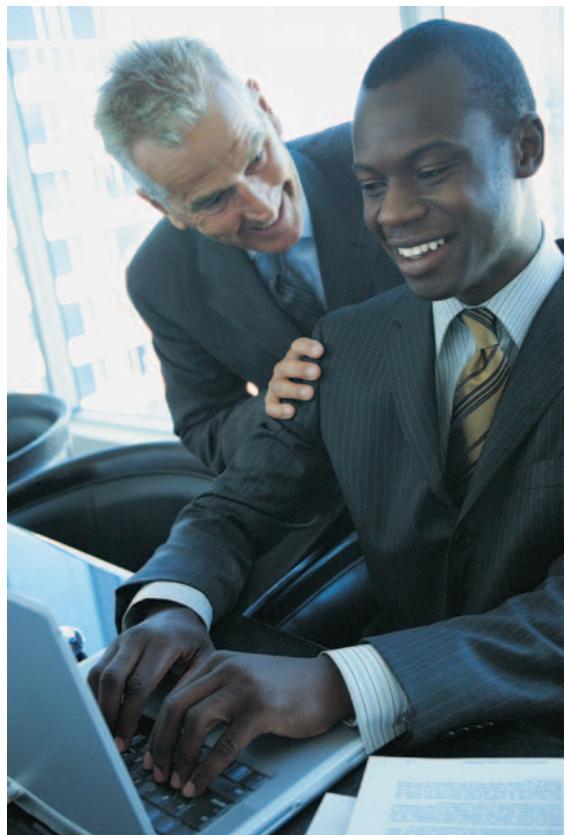
In order to build rapport, make sure that your facial expressions and body language are not communicating negativity. Smile and help put the other person at ease by being at ease yourself. If you are stressed and wishing you were somewhere else, it is highly unlikely that you will successfully build rapport. If you are unable to put aside other distractions, arrange to meet at a time when you will be able to give the other person your undivided attention.

One thing that can really help build rapport throughout your coaching relationship is your willingness to appropriately share any personal experiences you may have had that are similar to those the other person may be facing. Another simple key is to use first names and talk in normal conversational language during coaching sessions.

Encouraging feedback from the other person is also useful. Ask them to let you know what it is about your coaching that they are finding helpful and what they would like you to change, or any other appropriate comments. By making it clear that you are willing to receive their feedback to help you grow and improve as a coach, you will be leading by example. They are also more likely to feel comfortable with your input and feedback and therefore be more open to your coaching efforts.

Building Relationship

Because good coaching takes time, one-off discussions are not usually enough. Be on the lookout for opportunities to work alongside the person you are coaching. Try not to miss an opportunity to work together – whether it requires planning or is on the spur of the moment – as this will help build and strengthen your relationship.



Another tip for making sure you both get the most out of the time you are investing is to develop specific goals, timeframes and objectives for your coaching relationship. This will help you avoid the pitfall of getting lost on the journey.

Help the person to build a vision of the future and then look at the steps they can take to achieve that. Your role is not to set goals for them, but rather to guide them as they take responsibility for working out how they can improve.

Powerful questions you can use to do this are:

- How will things be different if you're successful?
- What does success look like?
- If you are already successful, what now?
- What needs to change, for success to happen?
- What do you need to do differently or more effectively?

Two-way Communication

To be effective as a coach, it is important you learn how to facilitate two-way communication. This requires that you develop your effective listening skills.

The key to good listening is to stop talking and start asking questions. Because of the interest you have in coaching the other person so they can stretch and develop, you might find yourself falling into "telling" mode and not listening enough. If you find yourself doing that, just try to slow down, relax and ask a question or two.

Other tips for good listening are:

- 1 Focus on the other person.** Give them all of your attention and make sure your mobile phone is turned off!
- 2 Look at them** – listen with your eyes as well as your ears. What is their expression telling you? Try and understand what their face and body is saying, not just the words they are speaking.
- 3 Paraphrase** what you have heard and repeat it back to them to check your understanding.
- 4 Try and draw the other person out.** If you start your questions with who, what, where, when, why or how, there is a good chance you will get more than just a one word answer in return.
- 5 Be aware of their emotions.** Listen to the tone and pace of their voice. For example, feelings of anxiety are often evidenced by faster speech and/or a higher tone.



▼ Re-frame

To help you be an effective coach, learn how to walk the other person through the “re-framing” process. Re-framing can be described as learning to look at an issue, situation or person from a different and/or positive perspective.

Often, the way a person views a particular situation will hinder their ability to deal with it. If their mindset is focused on the obstacles that stand in their way, or their inner conversation continually tells them that nothing will ever change, they limit the options they have to rectify or improve the situation.

This can also apply to things like the gap between a person’s current abilities and where they want them to be. Their thinking or self-belief can limit or stop them from achieving their goals.

Consider the example of a sales person who would like a promotion but their internal dialogue is continually telling them they don’t have what it takes to be a sales manager. Without changing that dialogue, it is highly likely they will remain a sales person. Take time to consider what thinking patterns may be limiting their ability to be successful.

Encourage them to make an honest appraisal of their skills and abilities. They could even complete a diagnostic instrument that measures the skills relevant to being a good manager. Help them to consider what actions they can take to develop in areas that are not current strengths.

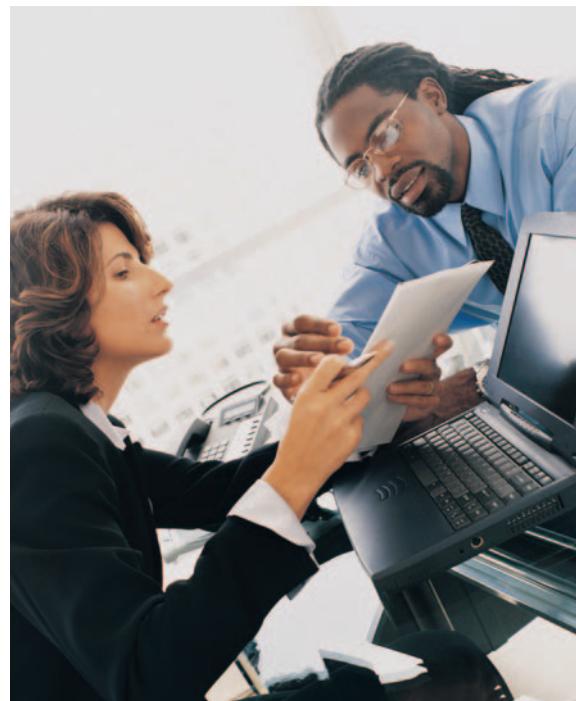
Importantly, focus on changing their thinking. For example, they could replace the thought mentioned above with the following: “I am capable of learning new skills that will help me to be an effective sales manager in the future”.

They will of course then need to follow up on this positive attitude by taking action to learn the skills that will move them towards achieving their goal. To use this process in coaching, help the person work through the steps listed below.

Six Steps to Re-framing

For each question, have the person stop and write down their answers (or you can do that together). After they have achieved their first goal (as described in point 6) work with them on a medium and long-term development plan.

1. What specifically is the situation, problem or issue?
2. What negative feelings are you having in relation to it?
3. What thoughts are leading to those feelings?
4. What thoughts could you replace them with that will be more helpful?
5. Look at the issue from this new viewpoint. Consider this as your new reality and from that perspective, ask yourself what steps you can take to move forward.
6. Select an action from the list you have created, that you can take within the next seven days and make yourself accountable to your coach for completing it.



▼ Record

Recording details about your coaching relationship, its goals and outcomes is important. This helps both you and the person being coached to know what to expect, to agree on how the coaching will progress, and ultimately, more accurately measure the outcomes. Following are some key points that need to be recorded.

At the commencement of the coaching relationship:

1. The commitment of both parties to the coaching process.
2. The roles and responsibilities of each person.
3. Any specific goals the person wants to achieve through the coaching.
4. How long the coaching will last, e.g., Is it for a short period, such as six weeks, to help the person work through a specific issue, or will ongoing coaching be provided for a longer period?
5. How often you will formally meet (and whether you will augment that wherever you can with informal opportunities).
6. An agreement to confidentiality – if you as a coach have to report back to the person's manager, they need to know that upfront.
7. How you will work through any disagreements. This should include a third party who (with the agreement of you both) can be asked to mediate if required.
8. How you will measure progress.



These points can be formalised through a “coaching contract”. An example is provided on the following page.

During programmed coaching sessions:

1. What has been achieved since last time (i.e., step-goals set during previous sessions)?
2. Any new issues or difficulties.
3. Other items discussed.
4. New goals and agreed timeframes.

At the cessation of the relationship:

1. Final achievements/outcomes attained.
2. Any issues outstanding.
3. For you as the coach and the person you are coaching: benefits and challenges experienced through the coaching relationship.
4. Improvement suggestions.

Sample Coaching Contract

Name: John Smith

Coach's Name: Julie Jones

Date: 3rd May, 2007

Intended length of coaching relationship: 3 months

We agree to meet:

Once a fortnight at the district office.

Wednesdays at 10am unless otherwise arranged.

We agree to the following confidentiality boundaries:

Confidentiality will be maintained by Julie at all times, unless there is real concerns for the personal safety of John or any other person. John is free to discuss the coaching sessions with anyone he wishes.

We agree to work through disagreements by:

Calmly talking about the issues, making sure we don't use personal attacks. If we are unable to work through the disagreement ourselves, we will ask Bob Hocking for help.

The goal of this coaching is:

For John to develop his management skills prior to taking up his new Sales Manager position on the first of August.

We will achieve this goal by:

Starting with a diagnostic instrument that measures John's current skills. We will then set step-goals for John to action that will help develop his skills, beginning with his lowest scoring categories.

We will know the goal has been achieved by:

The achievement of step-goals throughout the process, and ultimately by using the same diagnostic tool to measure his management skills and comparing the results.

▼ Review

The Coaching Contract on the previous page (or one like it) will help you to focus the activities of the person you are coaching on the achievement of their specified goal/s.

By systematically reviewing performance and achievements against what has been outlined, you can both check progress towards goals, making relevant adjustments and changes where necessary along the way.

Conducting regular and thorough reviews is helpful. Such reviews should not be restricted to the particular coaching situation or focus mainly on the personal relationship between the coach and coachee. Instead they should ideally look at the entire coaching experience from beginning to end and notes should be made on any areas in which future improvements would be beneficial.

The following questions can be used to help the person consider their progress, and identify any inhibitors to their progress.

Use the Skill Building template on the following page to help you lead the way through the coaching process, and develop your skills to be a more effective coach. It is based on the steps outlined in this booklet.

Coaching Review Trigger Questions

- 1** What did you both want to achieve when we first started coaching?
- 2** What do you both want to achieve now and how does that differ from your previous goal?
- 3** What were the reasons for wanting to achieve this original goal?
- 4** Are these still valid?
- 5** What plan of action did you both develop?
- 6** What have you both actually done?
- 7** If things haven't gone as planned, why is that?
- 8** What insights have you both gained as you set out to achieve the ultimate goal?
- 9** In hindsight what was done well in the approach taken?
- 10** In hindsight what was done less well than you would have liked?

Coaching Skill Building Template

