

# Crossing the line

## Managers as Coaches and Mentors

Matthew Barker

What sports star today would be without their coach? These days sports coaches are almost as famous as their protégés. There is no question of the importance of good coaching and mentoring in the sports arena, where competition is fierce and the investment injected into the creation of stars is massive. Coaches therefore have a lot of responsibility on their shoulders – in the end it's all about the returns, whether it be the glory or the money. In the words of the famous golfing coach, Harvey Penick, "I learn teaching from teachers. I learn golf from golfers. I learn winning from coaches".

It is not all that different in the world of business. The high flyers and decision makers may get the costly investment of an Executive Coach as so much rests on their ability to lead and influence. As the benefits of coaching become increasingly apparent, more and more middle managers are also receiving coaching. But the more you delve down into the lower echelons of corporate structure the less 'formal' coaching you will see.

But things are changing. With the focus of learning and development moving ever more onto the individual, coaching and mentoring are becoming desirable options at all levels as both methods are tailored completely to the individual's needs. Empowerment and performance can be inspired from the ground up.

Stuart Haden of Storm Beach Learning and Development designs and facilitates corporate coaching and mentoring programmes, and has seen his clients experience the benefits first hand. Having set

up relevant networks and support mechanisms for businesses, and proven their value to decision makers, Haden is passionately committed to the idea that Coaching through the management population can save a business time and money. As he points out; "Developing managers as coaches is an incredibly cost effective way of training staff, which is particularly important in today's current economic climate. If every manager we train goes onto coach one individual then the return on investment of the training is already achieved."

The corporate world is catching on. Organisations are looking at training their own managers to be coaches, or creating internal roles dedicated to coaching and mentoring. Most companies today still prefer to train line managers to use coaching skills as a way of developing their staff, or key specialists (such as HR) to deliver the service. In this way 'coaching' and 'mentoring' become additional management tools in the toolbox. Peer coaching is another way of creating a

'coaching culture'. The benefits of setting up a peer coaching network - where employees of a similar status or job role coach each other - is that it allows for a more honest exchange of information and reduces the barriers created when employees are expected to discuss their fears their manager.

It is worth differentiating 'coaching' from 'mentoring' at this early stage, although they often work in tandem, and there is a definite skills crossover. Stuart Haden describes "For some of our clients it is absolutely paramount to achieve a distinction between coaching and mentoring. For others they are content with ambiguity; essentially, whether it's one or the other, the primary purpose is to hold conversations that lead to improved performance."

**Coaching** relies heavily on questioning and listening, with the coach asking open questions of the individual to facilitate reflection and forward thinking, and thus helping an individual to find their own solutions and determine their own objectives.



Traditionally, giving advice is avoided during a coaching session, although coaching in business often requires this to happen at certain points. Many argue that one of the true benefits of coaching is enabling individuals to 'self-coach' themselves through future challenges using the questioning and objective setting techniques demonstrated through being coached. The sustainability of such an approach is often sadly overlooked in business.

However, it must be noted that for coaching to be a viable investment for most businesses, objectives will often be agreed with appropriate management so there can be some return on investment (ROI) expected. This doesn't change the fact that coaching should be about empowering an individual to meet challenges in their own preferred way, as opposed to being a 'wolf-in-sheep's-clothing' used to gently bully someone into submission.

**Mentoring** is often used where the individual requires a level of guidance, such as working towards a more senior role or career change.

Therefore, mentoring is best provided by someone who is more experienced or accomplished than the individual requiring guidance. The mentor will usually be proficient in the area of expertise that the 'mentee' requires – a more senior manager with many years experience in project management, for example. Although mentors require a certain understanding of the practice and boundaries of mentoring, they are often drawing upon existing knowledge. This means that most large multi-disciplined organisations will have a ready supply of mentors in their senior management population, who can be engaged relatively quickly in the process.

That said, setting up a coaching and mentoring culture in an organisation should be done properly, and therefore investment would be needed to deliver expert training to the potential coaches and mentors. As for any learning and development initiative, a coaching and mentoring programme needs endorsement from the top. Similarly, in some organisations, a paradigm shift may need to occur to signal

a change in management style for these new approaches to be effective. It all depends on how an organisation's management culture is currently perceived by staff.

It is really important to define what coaching and mentoring mean to the organisation – who will benefit, who will be the providers, in which situations and for what end? Haden confirms that an organization needs to understand what is to be expected from a programme, and be comfortable with it: "The setting up of any internal coaching programme must be a systematic process, with a clear structure. This is the key driver in increasing the frequency of managers coaching others."

Here are some questions to consider when deciding how - or if - a coaching and mentoring programme should be implemented in the organisation:

**What do I want to achieve?** - Why coaching and mentoring in the first place? Do you need either in your organisation? Stuart Haden notes: "Any coaching initiative must be aligned →



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to the organizations corporate strategy and therefore achieve buy in at a senior level. Furthermore, agreeing a senior manager as sponsor who can work with the Human Resources team is critical.”

Coaching and Mentoring are two of the most powerful development tools available and can be adapted for any organizational culture. If a company is performance driven and expects quick results, coach more often, in shorter time frames with well-defined objectives (for example, to hit sales targets confidently). Mentoring, as a method more open to direct advice and guidance, may be even more beneficial for speedier results. If on the other hand an organisation is all about inspiring people through personal development, more flexible long-term programmes with multiple outcomes may be appropriate.

**Mentoring, coaching or both?** – You may have partly answered this with the first question, but be sure to go back to the definitions and differences of both. If the objective is to help someone achieve something that requires a skill or confidence outside of their experience, and there is existing knowledge available in the business, a mentoring approach would be more appropriate. If the objective is to develop an individual to continue performing and growing, and there is a longer timeframe available, coaching often brings about a more fundamental change. In reality, a mixture of both will probably work across organisations for different programmes and outcomes.

**Who is it for?** – Is intensive coaching required primarily for your most pivotal decision makers? Do you wish to offer career development programmes that would benefit

from the experience of those who have been there, done that? Is it an objective of the business to develop a ‘coaching culture’ at all levels? If the intention is that coaching and mentoring will permeate the everyday management style of the business, then it will be easier to coach and mentor more individuals informally; when allocating new tasks to individuals, supporting them through new challenges or conducting team meetings. The skills of listening, questioning and empowering others become habit over time, and part of the management style of an organisation. If however coaching within your organisation is defined as having a definite structure and purpose, for example, when coaching people on career paths as part of a succession programme, then this becomes an investment of time for both the coach and ‘coachee’. Can you realistically provide this programmatic

approach for all employees? You will need to be very clear about the objectives and target population for such a solution.

It becomes the age old HR consideration – which individuals are worth the level of investment and will bring the returns? Stuart Haden talks of the ‘second P’, “Once you have clearly defined the people who are going to be involved you also need to consider internal processes. For example, what infrastructure will support the coaching - intranet, training groups, training nomination etc.”

**Who should deliver it?** The answer may vary for different approaches and different programmes. To buy-in experienced coaching is expensive. Needless to say this approach is more commonly used for senior management.

When organisations decide to deliver coaching and mentoring down the ranks, it is important that internal providers – most often line management - are selected and trained appropriately to deliver the service. This is where the services of a professional Coach are best used – as part of a ‘coach the coach’ programme. Bad practice is a risk - imagine the damage that could be done if an employee is unwittingly bullied into doing something that goes against their better judgement through ineffective coaching, or is let down by a senior manager who is supposed to mentor them through a project?

Haden, having provided training to both managers and HR teams in Coaching and Mentoring sees the benefit in engaging stakeholders in the process. “Coaching is

a relatively new arena so we tend to deliver coaching and mentoring programmes without the delivery support of the in house training teams. Of course this is likely to change. One area that has brought fantastic benefits is using those managers who have been trained to support the delivery of other sessions. That way delegates can begin to visualize possibilities for their learning and hear it from the horses mouth.” Stuart Haden

To build credibility around the roles of ‘coach’ and ‘mentor’ a number of actions should be considered:

- Build coaching and mentoring skills and behaviours into management competency frameworks; thereby any activity that uses competencies, such as development reviews, will be influenced. →



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- Establish a 'code of practice' for coaching and mentoring, considering all the definitions and issues discussed, and outlining confidentiality parameters.
- Assess potential coaches/mentors on their ability to deliver the role before allowing them to practice, and build an internal selection procedure for recruiting coaches and mentors.
- Build monitoring and feedback mechanisms into coaching and mentoring programmes, and manage the quality of the service provided.
- Schedule continuous development opportunities for practitioners to keep up the quality of the provision.
- Build measures to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes: satisfaction surveys, impact on performance indicators, objectives met on completion of a programme.

#### THE WAY FORWARD

By taking on coaching and mentoring, an organisation is sending a message out to its employees that their individual performance, confidence and motivation are important. The power of these tools can be manifested at every level, as long as managers are trained, developed and monitored in their delivery of these skills. Haden sees the potential; "Overwhelmingly we have found that the managers we work with have amazing experience that is just waiting to be tapped into. Combine this with their developing coaching skills and you have energy to transform individuals and organizations." ■

Stuart Haden can be found at [www.stormbeach.co.uk](http://www.stormbeach.co.uk)