

NO NONSENSE ADVICE

22

BASICS OF COACHING

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This book will look at coaching from multiple angles. We will look at it from the perspective of a coach, the coached (coachee) as well as an organisational perspective (looking at an organisation bringing coaching as a development intervention).

PROLOGUE:

Coaching isn't the Panacea for All Organizational Woes!

Before you start even considering taking on the role of a coach or introducing coaching as a development intervention, it is important to understand that coaching, like any other tool, is applicable and effective only in certain contexts. To consider coaching as the 'solution' to any development need your organisation/team may have, is as ludicrous as considering Piriton as the solution for all forms of allergies!

Coaching is an extremely powerful tool, and used right, it will deliver amazing results. However, choosing the right coach, ensuring the 'coached' is prepped and actually 'ready' to be coached, ensuring the required support is given to practice what is taught/gained, and also, having a culture that supports learning and development are all important considerations if coaching is actually supposed to 'work' for you and the organisation. Coaching (no matter how good the coach is or how much the participant wants it) cannot deliver results in a vacuum or without the supporting ecosystem.

It is also important to ensure that you're clear about what the outcomes you want are, from the out-set. If YOU, as an organisation, haven't quite firmed up the deliverables and are in two minds about what you want to achieve, then, please do everyone a favour and DON'T hire coaches because it will generally end in a lot of unwanted woe all-round – and it would be squarely your fault as a client. However, having said that, a coach can also establish what the gaps in your organization might be if you allow them to observe and interview some key figures in the organization; but this is a specialized skill and not every coach can manage it.

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Part 1
Getting the Basics
Out of the Way

Before we even start, shall we please consider what coaching is?

- It is a creative partnership between two or more people that inspires new thinking.
 - It is a process of self-discovery.
- It allows you to make decisions and take action in the areas that serve you best.

How is coaching different to mentoring?

- Mentoring is the imparting of your knowledge and experience to help someone achieve specific goals/targets.
- Coaching digs much deeper in allowing you to figure out what's right for you at that moment, regardless of someone else's experience or opinion.

Coaching, advising, counselling: are they all the same?

- These are all distinct methodologies that overlap depending on the coach/therapist's style. Counselling deals with reconciling your past experiences to operate in the present more fully. Coaching takes you from the present to where you want to be in the future. Advising is what you do with your peers and friends!

What is the best coaching method?

- What's your favourite flavour of ice-cream? In general, every ice-cream recipe has the same basic ingredients: milk, cream, sugar, gelatin and egg yolk. The difference is in the flavours that are your personal preference, much like the style of coaching you prefer. Coaching methodologies will vary, so you need to find what you connect with. NLP coaching is a different experience to the regular coaching experience depending on whether you are looking to improve your performance, leadership, career, parenting or relationships; it really depends on whether the style of the coach is a good fit for you.

Does coaching REALLY work ?

- Does Usain Bolt have a coach? Is the coach a faster runner? His coach isn't a faster runner otherwise they would hold the world record for the 100m. However, the coach knows how to unlock switches that improve performance. That's what we do as coaches. Research consistently shows that having accountability for your actions will act as one of the best motivating factors to create the change you need to.

Part 2

Being a Coach

Do you need to be certified to be a coach?

Absolutely. A coaching certification (aligned to a recognized body) displays that a person has had the appropriate training and practice. This is largely an unregulated industry, so you need to hire a competent coach who has the relevant rigor in their training.

Is a certification enough to be a professional coach?

Technically, yes. However, it doesn't mean you're an effective coach. It's the start of your learning journey and not the end. Coaches need to continue to practice what they've learnt and continue to experience and explore updated methodologies.

What are a coach's duties and responsibilities?

Explore and assess the clients' needs. Devise a plan and strategy around achieving an outcome that their client wants. The coach is in the driver's seat and they need to guide the conversation. They hold the client accountable for their commitment to themselves.

How do you build your own 'style' of coaching?

Your style of coaching needs to align to your personality. Some coaches are soft and mellow in style. Others will be direct and hard hitting. You need to see what you're comfortable with.

Differentiating between Performance Coaching and Behavioral Coaching

Performance tends to be work and sport related. Behavioral tends to be more personal. However, it's an artificial distinction as both are intertwined. You can't perform at work if your behaviour hasn't been addressed.

The initial meetup: how to set the outlines

I like to have a 30-minute discovery call to see if we're a good fit for each other and to see whether they really do want to play all out. I don't charge for this as it's also an opportunity to start building rapport.

Putting structure around the coaching assignment

Establish the areas that the coachee wants to work on with an understanding that this may change along the way. Focus on key areas and decide on what success looks like in each area.

Assessing whether the 'coach/coached' fit is right

Every relationship is unique, so you need to assess whether the synergy is there or not. You may not feel it in the first session, but be patient. Is the coachee getting the insights they need?

Ensuring the coaching objectives are set straight

Note that these may change, but be clear on the objectives at the start of each session so you're both aligned.

Ensuring the follow-up doesn't disintegrate into just a 'chat'

Again, start with a plan in mind before you go in. Something else may come up, so be flexible; but always have a point to the conversation. Make sure there are key takeaways from each session.

Pushing, without pushing

Before the challenging questions come up, ensure that there is a space for vulnerability; and much of that is down to rapport. Pushing someone when trust hasn't been built leads to disaster. If a question comes to mind, ask for permission: "Do you mind if I challenge you?" Ask the question and keep their synapses firing.

Knowing when to pull the plug

The frequency of coaching varies per client. However, I like to take a similar approach to car maintenance. If there is a problem, let's deal with it immediately so we're running optimally. If things seem to be going well, then check in every 2-4 months for a service. It's important to maintain motivation and accountability, otherwise the client can fall behind.

Part 3

BEING Coached

As much as being focused on hiring the 'right' coach for the organisation, it is equally important that those who are being coached are prepped too, that is, the coachees. NOT prepping them and ensuring that they understand the expectations AFTER the program is a recipe for disaster and generally results in a 'conversation' that doesn't become anything more than a waste of time.

Being coached should not be 'forced' on a person; it should always be a choice. BEFORE you hire a coach, it is important for a Line Manager and/or HR to sit with the candidate and take them through their development needs, and discuss how a Personal Coach can actually help in that journey and weigh the options.

"But I just don't have the time."

"But if the guy is not from MY industry how can they help?"

"But I don't think anyone can REALLY help me with the kind of stuff I have going on with me right now."

These are common 'BUTS' that come in which need structured answers BEFORE a coach is as-signed. NOT doing so means that the coaching starts off on the wrong footing, and often times, that first impression and misaligned expectations become rather difficult to bridge.

So, as much as focusing on the 'coach', make sure you focus on the coachees as well.

WHY do you need a coach?

First, you as a person who is expected to go through coaching, needs to be convinced that you NEED it. Sure, a good coach will have a solid conversation with you on it before they start out, but honestly, that isn't really HIS prerogative. YOU need to be convinced that you can do with the support, and that coaching is the way to go (as opposed to going for general training, engaging in online learning, etc.)

IF you are not convinced, organize an initial call with your proposed coach, ask them about your concerns and get these sorted out BEFORE committing to trying it out. Remember, the organisation IS spending time and money on this, and therefore, you kind of owe it to them to ensure that you do it only if you are thoroughly convinced of its merits.

Choosing the RIGHT coach

There really is never a PERFECT COACH but there certainly can be the right fit for YOU. Finding the right coach is often tough, but these simple questions can help you narrow the search:

- Have they been in the kind of situations I have been in?
 - Are they familiar with the contexts and/or industry?
- Has someone I trust and knows me well enough referred them?
- What is their working style like, 30 mins at a time once a week or an hour minimum a week for a certain period of time?
- Can they appreciate my cultural and faith based identity that will impact my decision making?

Now, it is important to understand that if you are coached on general aspects, then, having industry exposure or context isn't honestly all that important. However, if you are to be coached on specific contextual aspects, then that level of exposure makes all the difference in the world. There really isn't a surefire way of ensuring you have the best fit, but general guidelines to follow are: to take a look at the work your proposed coach has done before, talk to others they have coached to get a sense of their style, idiosyncratic ways and methodologies, and see if they resonate with you.

Preparing for a coaching intervention: simple mindset changes you need to be ok with

If you REALLY want to be coached, there are a few things you must understand.

- You can't be defensive about everything; you need to be open.
- You can't resort to phrases like 'you don't understand my context'; it is actually YOUR prerogative to explain your context so that your coach can help you.
- You can't pull rank on them EVEN if you are a Managing Director.
- You are expected to be respectful at all times no matter how 'junior' or 'young' your coach is.

IF you want to be coached, you really must be ok about being 'told a few things', and also-at times, 'being told off'; it's all part of the coaching journey. IF you don't want to submit yourself to someone else's insights and views, then coaching is just not for you.

YOUR responsibilities in the coaching intervention

As much as the coach, you TOO have duties and responsibilities in ensuring the coaching WORKS.

- Make sure you stick to the schedules and be on time every time.
- Ensure the work you committed to is done, and done right! Never turn up for a coaching discussion without having completed the agreed to tasks.
- Ensure your meeting time is WITHOUT DISTURBANCE. If the sessions are in your office, then ensure that you can close the door and put a 'Do not Disturb' sign on it. We recommend you have the coaching conversation in an out of office venue.
- Make sure you are able to ask questions and clarify the expectations, rather than assuming.
- Be PROACTIVE and make the most of the coach rather than merely 'turning up' and 'doing as you are told'.
- IF you have any concerns or any 'issues' with the coach, pick these up with them rather than 'complaining' at the first given opportunity.
- Be willing to try things out rather than merely vetoing them based on your experience/views.

How to make the most of a coaching intervention

Coaching can be a hugely rewarding and extremely augmenting experience. Here are a few tips to make the most out of your coaching assignment:

- Be very SPECIFIC about the objectives and discuss about your needs without holding back. The more your coach knows you, the better they can help.
- Build in a feedback mechanism from key 'stakeholders' you work with from the outset and get regular feedback about how you are progressing. You may not always see how you behave but others do. So, making sure you get that feedback helps you 'adjust' yourself on a continuous basis.
- You know yourself more than anyone else. Take what your coach says and contextualize it before you implement it. Your coach is NOT a 'seer', so understand THEIR context and make it your own; this is the best way to ensure you bring your tacit knowledge to play to your advantage.
- Keep communication channels open with your coach, and don't wait until your designated day to clarify things. Touch base as and when you need to clarify things, and ensure you develop an ongoing dialogue outside the coaching days themselves.

Ultimately, YOU are the biggest beneficiary of this, so invest your time and energy on making the most of it.

Part 4
Optimizing Coaching
inside an Organization

Today many organizations have recognized the benefits of coaching.

The coaching culture involves both managing and influencing individuals and ensuring their development. However, for the coaching to be successful, there is a requirement of a certain level of commitment from both the organisation and the employee. This also requires organisations to ensure that the coaches are qualified and that there is focus on the expected results and ROI.

Choosing who should or shouldn't be a Coach inside an Organization

While being selected as a coach is a reward in a way, it is also a responsibility. Just as you would not promote someone based on just tenure, you need to take into consideration other factors that would ensure that the selected individual is able to deliver on the expectations of the role.

Factors such as performance, attitude, caliber and skills are just some that need to be considered at the point of nomination. This is a serious responsibility, and the identified individual must have the potential to carry out the role with respect and professionalism.

Another factor that is important to consider is the target audience. The nominated individuals should be able to support the overall organisation. So, selection must cover individuals from a diverse group, preferably with sufficient exposure.

Getting the Training done Right

Once you have made the first cut, these individuals must be trained to create the right kind of mindset. Ensure that the teams understand the purpose of this exercise. As failing to set the right expectations by the organisation can lead to resistance from other employees and coachees.

Invest in ensuring that the selected individuals are trained to look at every angle to the role. They must be empowered to be able to guide those under their purview to develop independence in their respective line of work.

Coaches must be able to utilize this skill to manage everything from daily discussions to one-on-ones and performance reviews.

Putting Frameworks around how Coaching should happen

Coaching should flow in all directions. It must be done in a transparent manner and be engagement driven through collaboration. Individuals must be able to ask difficult questions and challenge status quo and this culture must be accepted. A framework that ensures a more holistic approach would, therefore, consider not just identifying the right coach, but also many other factors: how they would deliver on the role, assessing them and monitoring their performance, and also the performance of the coaches and how it impacts the overall organisation.

The ideal framework should include:

- Purpose and principles in setting up the coaching process
 - How to link it to the overall business strategy
- How to identify and assess the potential internal coaches
 - How to prepare the potential coaches
- How to communicate the strategy to the organisation
- How to assess the value and benefit each coach will bring to the organisation
- How to assess the value each coachee gets from the coaching
 - How to track the coaching performance and its effectiveness
- How to continuously improve the coaches and their standards

Tracking Coaching Performance and Effectiveness

An organisation that embarks on this journey should also ensure that there is a proper framework around coaching as discussed in the previous point. If we fail to track performance and effectiveness, we are literally flying blind. It is important for the organisation to assess and track the performance of each coach. Before rolling out the program, always determine how success will be measured. It could be done as a survey or even via an interview of the coachees and their line managers.

Either way, these areas must be covered:

- The method/approach used by the coach
- The overall understanding of the objectives and goals by the coachee
 - Improvement on self-development
 - Action taken as a direct result of the coaching
 - Key success made possible as a result of the coaching
- The coachee's impact on others as experienced by the coachee
 - The improvement in the level of confidence in the coachee
- The improvement in the productivity and effectiveness of the coachee

Conversations around these topics with key individuals in the organisation who are exposed to the coachee would reveal the impact the coaching session has had on the coachee. This is bearing in mind that the commitment to coaching and being coached are still at the very top.

How to in-build Continuous Improvement to Coaching

The success of your business strategy would depend on the effectiveness and the strength of the coaching strategy. The coaching culture has to work across the entire organisation. The culture must also encourage an environment of ongoing and continued development of the coaches and enhancing their skills through training and feedback.

Implementing focused and structured training, sharing best practices on internal coaching from around the world and regular discussions on the challenges and issues are some basic steps to ensure that the coaches are up to speed and effective in their roles.

Part 5
Practical Tips
and Insights

Preparing for a Coaching 'Conversation'

I like to do the following:

- Conduct a discovery session for a new client
- Ensure that you're not distracted and are in an empowered state
- Ensure that they're fully focused and get them into an empowered state by building rapport
- Have a goal in mind: so ask what we're addressing this session at the start. Remember this may change along the way.
- Discuss placement so that they know at what time the session finishes. At points, don't be afraid to say: "So we have 20 minutes left...". This brings focus to the conversation.
 - Be ready to tap into insights and help them figure out actions
 - Hold them accountable.

Handling 'Tough' Conversations

- Get comfortable with silences. These are great opportunities for the client to reflect. You don't need to fill in the gaps.
 - Ask them: "What's happening for you right now?"
- If the coachee is feeling overwhelmed, you can say: "Describe how you're feeling right now in a single word." This will help them focus on the important points, one thing at a time.

Key Reasons why Coaching Assignments fail: and how to overcome them

- Lack of rapport. No trust established, so the coachees don't feel safe to be vulnerable.
 - The coachees don't want to make the changes or do the work.
- The coach needs to listen for insight and not agreement and establish the limiting beliefs around their lack of action.
- You need the coachees to have skin in the game regardless of who's paying. The greatest challenge is that they don't want to be there. Focus on an area that they really care about and will make a difference in their lives. Then you'll move them in what we call the 'toward state'. This means they have a mentality that 'reward is better' instead of 'threat is stronger'. You do this by giving them a sense of control, rapport or relatedness to others, allowing them to understand what to expect, letting them understand their status (you'll be better than or less than).

EPILOGUE: COACHING ADDS VALUE ONLY IN CERTAIN CONTEXTS

Coaching is your go to modern self-development tool and can be established under most scenarios to move a person from where they are currently to where they desire to be.

Unfortunately, with low level stress which is a common feature of many workplaces, we all need tools and techniques to move us towards a healthier state of mind and body for our own wellbeing, the wellbeing of our organizations and certainly our families.

That is a small price to pay in order to live your most authentic life and fulfil your highest potential, but the first thing you need to start your journey of coaching is the courage to be vulnerable enough to look at your life from the inside out.

I promise you the time, energy and money will be well worth it!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



MANSOOR AHMED

A multi-talented Strategic Director with over 20 years of experience focused on driving transparency & customer delight. Highly experienced in delivery of programmes and developing mindset & behaviour in people to operate at the highest level. Adaptive with capacity to execute & complete multiple projects in complex environments. A driver for using automation to improve efficiency. Strong team management, strategy skills coupled with excellent communication have helped deliver a range of Integration and Transformation initiatives in an Agile manner. More recently with a focus on the SRE (Site Reliability Engineer) support model in line with DevOps.



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VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



ANTON THAYALAN

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional Clients.