

**SOURCE:**

Kraiger, K. (Ed). (2002).  
*Creating, Implementing,  
and Managing Effective  
Training and Development.*  
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

# MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

## *Coaching and Mentoring Programs*

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Coaching has achieved such popularity that many organizations now refer to their managers as coaches. In fact, consultants in fields as diverse as financial investing and health and beauty are calling themselves coaches in order to cash in on the term's cachet. Coaching and mentoring—potentially powerful tools for management development—now face the risk of devolving into faddish buzz words and trendy but marginally effective programs. To reduce that risk, and to help you and your organization capture the full potential of coaching and mentoring, this chapter presents a practical framework for accelerating learning and development through coaching, examines best practices in coaching, highlights common pitfalls and what you can do to avoid them, and outlines specific recommendations for designing effective programs in three areas: an individual coaching program, an organizational program for coaching groups of individuals, and a companywide mentoring program.

NOTE: I am extremely grateful to Mary Dee Hicks, Seymour Uranowitz, and Donna M. Genett for their helpful comments and suggestions on this chapter.

The primary focus of this chapter is on coaching because it has broader applicability and a more generalizable skill set than mentoring.<sup>1</sup> Consider the following comment from an insightful senior manager at a Fortune 50 high-tech company: “There is a huge difference between coaching and mentoring. Coaching is part of your job as a manager and you have to do it. Mentoring is about chemistry; if you don’t have the chemistry between two people you can’t force it. A mentor needs the time, the bandwidth, and the propensity to do it. A mentor needs to be someone you look up to, someone you respect, and they have to be interested in, and actually like, the person they are mentoring” (Mike Rose, personal communication with the author, January 8, 1996). That fits with the distinction drawn by Peterson and Hicks (1996), “Mentors typically share insights and lessons from their personal storehouse of experiences and opportunities. Coaches paint development with a broader brush; they understand the process of learning and help create the conditions for it to occur” (p. 16).

### A PARADIGM SHIFT

Before 1990, a suggestion that a manager needed a coach was invariably perceived as a personal indictment of the individual’s skills or performance. Most people referred to coaching were, in fact, viewed as talented but flawed. Similarly, coaches tended to emphasize the negative and remedial aspects of working with people, from overcoming resistance (Jellison, 1993) to preventing derailment (Kaplan, 1991; Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989).

By the late 1990s, coaching had taken on a positive, proactive tone (for example, Executive Coaching Forum of Boston, 2000; Whitworth, Kimsey-House, & Sandahl, 1998; see also Hicks & Peterson, 1997; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A suggestion that a manager needs coaching today is likely to be met with “Well, of course I do. Everything around here is changing so fast that I need new skills just to keep pace,” rather than with denial or defensiveness. Yet even though the paradigm of coaching has shifted, many of the techniques of and assumptions about coaching still rest on either negative or irrelevant vestiges of the past, such as those presented in the left column of Exhibit 6.1.

**EXHIBIT 6.1. OLD AND NEW ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COACHING.**

<b>Assumptions in Remedial Approaches to Coaching</b>	<b>Assumptions for Positive, Proactive Coaching</b>
People resist change and the coach's task is to motivate them to develop.	People are motivated to learn and grow; the coach's task is to tap into that motivation to develop.
Coaching needs to start with a thorough assessment or needs analysis so people have an accurate picture of themselves and their development needs.	Insight is a never-ending discovery process that is nurtured throughout the entire coaching process; all that is necessary to begin is a good starting point.
Coaches need to provide feedback to the people they coach.	Although feedback from the coach may be helpful, the coach's primary role is to help people improve their ability to nurture deeper insights by gathering their own feedback.
Coaches have a more objective understanding than the participant.	Both coaches and participants have important insights and information. By working together, they can put together a more useful picture of what is happening.
Coaches need to be experts in a given topic in order to teach it to people.	Coaches need to be experts in how people learn so they can help people actually change behaviors and become more effective. One of the most valuable things a coach can do is help people learn how to learn for themselves.
Coaching takes a lot of time and effort.	Coaching is about finding leverage so that people focus on the one or two things that will have the greatest payoff.
Coaching is about fixing problem behaviors (an assumption that often leads to a focus on the past).	Coaching is about improving future performance: it works best when the focus is on understanding what works for the person, what does not work for her, and what she will do the next time she is in that situation.

Even though many of the stated approaches to coaching reflect partnership and positive development, the actual approaches reveal implicit assumptions that people resist change and that the coach has the right ideas and motivations while the learner does not. Such assumptions perpetuate a top-down approach to development, which diminishes motivation and inhibits learners from taking responsibility for their own learning (Hicks & Peterson, 1997). Coaching will have the greatest impact when the techniques are aligned around positive values for learning and partnering with people. Think about it yourself. What kind of coach would you want to work with? One who assumes you will resist change or one who partners with you? As you read this chapter, keep these ideas in mind and examine yourself to get a better understanding of your own implicit assumptions.

### WHAT MAKES A GREAT COACH?

Back in 1997, I started asking two questions of participants at my workshops and seminars (Peterson, 2001). First I asked them to discuss and then list the characteristics of a good coach. By far the two most common responses were being a good listener and displaying genuine interest in the person being coached. These were followed by several other themes: good coaches are seen as trustworthy, honest, with high integrity; direct, able to confront and challenge appropriately; and flexible and willing to adapt to the person they are coaching.

The second question is similar, but with enough of a difference that it produces a distinctly different set of answers: What are the characteristics of a great coach, and how do great coaches differ from good ones? Most groups respond to this question with several moments of silence. In over half the groups, someone will then declare, "Great coaches get results." This moment of insight is what I am looking for, when people realize that a list of qualities or behaviors is not what makes a great coach. Great coaches focus on achieving the desired outcome, through a variety of techniques and tools. The discussion at this point often turns to deeper insights, such as these:

- Great coaches are goal-oriented. They use listening, empathy, and honesty to help people achieve a desired outcome.
- Great coaches know when to listen and when to interrupt or challenge (rather than just be a good listener). As one person observed, “A great coach takes the whole set of tools we listed, and like a true artist, knows how to do the right thing at the right times
- Great coaches are rarely wedded to specific methods or techniques because they search for what each individual needs in order to learn. They focus on what the person needs rather than on the coaching itself.
- Great coaches are good learners themselves.

What has continually amazed me in all of these discussions is that not one person has mentioned expertise in learning or in human behavior as an important quality for a coach to have. There has been no mention that good coaches understand what motivates people, how people learn, and how people act and interact with others. Even more puzzling is why most professional books, articles, and discussions of coaching barely mention these topics (see Peterson & Hicks, 1999). Yet this issue rests at the heart of how we define coaching. If the purpose of coaching is to help people gain insight, learn new things, change their behavior, and improve their effectiveness and satisfaction in life’s activities, then expertise in those areas—cultivating insight, facilitating new learning, guiding the application and transfer of new insights and skills—is essential to being a great coach.

### NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

Along with a shifting view in the field of coaching, the early 1990s saw several attempts to consolidate decades of research on how best to facilitate individual learning (Curtis & Stricker, 1991; Druckman & Bjork, 1991; Hellervik, Hazucha, & Schneider, 1992; Mahoney, 1991; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992; Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994). My colleague Mary Dee Hicks and I sought to translate this psychology of individual learning into tools and techniques that are accessible to a wide range of people in organizations (Hicks & Peterson, 1997, 1999a, 1999b;

**FIGURE 6.1. THE DEVELOPMENT PIPELINE.**

Peterson & Hicks, 1995, 1996, 2000). The foundation of our approach is the development pipeline (Hicks & Peterson, 1999a; see Figure 6.1), which outlines the necessary and sufficient conditions for systematic learning.

Coaching, like any management development approach, needs to consider how to address the essential ingredients of development, as summarized in Exhibit 6.2.

The pipeline metaphor is useful in diagnosing where development interventions such as coaching have the greatest value. By analogy, the amount of water that will flow through a pipe is determined by the size of the pipe at its narrowest point. Similarly, we look for the constraints in the development pipeline to determine the most productive point to begin coaching. Two common examples reveal the value of this framework:

- A decentralized organization is trying to improve cross-group collaboration and speed of operation in order to keep up with new competitors. After months of dialogue and skills training, most managers understand what is expected of them (insight), recognize the need to change (motivation), and have the basic skills (capabilities) and opportunities to use them, but their primary accountability is still for the performance of their separate divisions, not for the organization as a whole. Until the organization starts measuring and rewarding collaboration, few people will change their behavior. In this situation, feedback and skills training techniques will have little effect until the real issue—accountability—is addressed.
- An R&D manager is told, “We’d like you to attend a class on active listening, because the people in marketing feel that you don’t listen to them or take their views seriously.” This assumes that a lack of capability is the problem. However, this same manager demonstrates effective listening skills with his team and his superiors. On further exploration, it is discovered that he does not fully understand the growing

**EXHIBIT 6.2. THE DEVELOPMENT PIPELINE:  
NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT.**

Necessary Conditions	What Coaches Can Do
<p><b>Insight:</b> <i>Do people know what to develop?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help people clarify their personal goals, values, and motivators.</li> <li>• Help people understand what others expect of them and what it takes to be successful in their environment.</li> <li>• Teach people to get feedback from others.</li> <li>• Identify where skill enhancement or development of new capabilities will have the greatest payoff.*</li> </ul>
<p><b>Motivation:</b> <i>Are people willing to invest the time and energy it takes to develop themselves?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify both personal and organizational reasons for change.</li> <li>• Identify personal and organizational environmental barriers that will make change difficult.</li> <li>• Seriously examine the trade-offs and make a realistic decision to proceed.</li> <li>• Discuss specific steps for addressing barriers and challenges.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Capabilities:</b> <i>Do people have the skills and knowledge they need?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share new ideas and best practices.</li> <li>• Help people find appropriate resources and opportunities.</li> <li>• Explore alternative ways to handle difficult situations.</li> <li>• Practice new skills and behaviors in realistic situations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Real-World Practice:</b> <i>Do people have opportunities to try their new skills at work?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify specific situations where change is appropriate.</li> <li>• Help people determine how they will put small changes into practice every day.</li> <li>• Work with people to create personal strategies for assessing what is working well and what they need to do differently.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accountability:</b> <i>Do people internalize their new capabilities to improve performance and results?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage people to make specific commitments for action.</li> <li>• Follow up on learning assignments and personal commitments for action.</li> <li>• Encourage people to enlist others to give them feedback and discuss progress.</li> </ul>

\*See Peterson and Hicks (1995, 1996) for a discussion of GAPS (goals and values, abilities, perceptions, and success factors), a summary of the various types of information necessary for full insight.

importance of marketing for designing products that can compete in the marketplace (insight) and therefore is little motivated to spend time discussing such topics with the marketing team. In this case, directly addressing insight would alleviate the most significant constraint and allow change to happen.

When coaches follow the same game plan with everyone they work with, they squander one of the greatest advantages of coaching: customization. It is common to hear coaches describe a rote process: “First we’ll do a 360-degree feedback survey, then we’ll have a two-hour feedback session, then we’ll write our coaching plan, then we’ll work on active listening skills...” Such an approach wastes the participant’s time if she already has a clear sense of her development priorities. A better approach is to determine first if insight is constrained, and then to determine whether 360-degree feedback is an appropriate tool for this person. This targets the real need and enables the coach to focus time and energy where it will have the greatest payoff. The development pipeline as a framework for the necessary conditions for change aids the coach in searching for the most significant constraints and then in designing an approach customized to that person’s needs. This focused approach produces the most rapid and efficient learning.

Peterson and Hicks (1996; see also Peterson, 1996; Hicks & Peterson, 1999b) outline five strategies that coaches can use to work through the necessary conditions for learning outlined in the development pipeline.

### **Forge a Partnership**

The coach’s first big challenge is to build sufficient trust and understanding so that people want to work with him. Unless this is established, coaches are unlikely to have the opportunity they need to effectively address the development pipeline conditions.

### **Inspire Commitment**

The next stage is to build insight and motivation—the first two components of the pipeline—so people focus their energy on goals that matter. Coaching participants need an objective picture of their abilities and how they are perceived by others. In addition, coaches can tap into a powerful

motivation for development by ensuring a good understanding of what really matters to the person and those around him or her. This complete picture of insight facilitates identifying development priorities that will have a high payoff for both the person and the organization.

### **Build Skills**

At this point, the coach can help the person build the new capabilities he needs to do what is required. Coaches may directly teach new skills or guide the person to draw on a wide range of other learning opportunities for acquiring new knowledge and skills.

### **Promote Persistence**

One of the most neglected aspects of coaching and developing others is helping them maintain the discipline to break old habits and establish new ones through actually practicing their new skills in real-world settings. Two opposite challenges arise at this point. First, it often feels risky for people to replace tried-and-true behaviors with new approaches they are not comfortable with. Second, once they have begun the process, rapid gains in improvement are usually followed by plateaus; it is a slow, tedious process consciously to work on a behavior until it becomes natural. It is easy for people to give up at this point, unless they have continued monitoring and support from their coach.

### **Shape the Environment**

Too often coaches focus only on the one-on-one nature of the coaching relationship and neglect to orchestrate the environment to reward learning and remove barriers that the person will run into. At a minimum, coaches can work with their clients' organizational sponsors so that they provide regular feedback and encouragement to the person.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS: EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF COACHING

Apart from one recent study by Manchester Consulting (Fisher, 2001; Manchester Consulting, 2000) and studies conducted primarily by researchers from Personnel Decisions International (Birkeland, Davis,

Goff, Campbell, & Duke, 1997; Davis & Petchenik, 1998; Peterson, 1993a, 1993b; Thompson, 1986), very little empirical work has been conducted on coaching outcomes (Kilburg, 1996, 2000).<sup>2</sup>

Researchers at Manchester Consulting (2000; see also Fisher, 2001) found that one hundred executives who participated in coaching reported improvements in the following areas: working relationships with direct reports (reported by 77 percent of executives), working relationships with immediate supervisors (71 percent), teamwork (67 percent), working relationships with peers (63 percent), job satisfaction (61 percent), conflict reduction (52 percent), organizational commitment (44 percent), and working relationships with clients (37 percent).

They also report significant benefits to the organization, noting improvements in the following areas: productivity (reported by 53 percent of executives), quality (48 percent), organizational strength (48 percent), customer service (39 percent), reducing customer complaints (34 percent), retaining executives who received coaching (32 percent), cost reductions (23 percent), and bottom-line profitability (22 percent).

Thompson (1986) conducted a follow-up study of over two hundred individuals who had participated in coaching during the early 1980s. According to self-reports and ratings by superiors, these coaching participants had made substantial improvements in their skills as a result of coaching and had sustained them over time. Peterson (1993a, 1993b) examined pre-, post-, and follow-up ratings (including ratings on a set of control items) from participants, their superior, and their coach. Considering just the superiors' ratings, the average participant (N= 370) showed 1.54 SDs of change on their learning objectives. This represents over three times the amount of change achieved in the average well-designed management training and development program examined by Burke and Day (1986). In addition to dramatic improvement in specific skills, participants also showed a significant improvement in overall performance, based on ratings by superiors (Peterson, 1993b).

Another study (Birkeland et al., 1997; Davis & Petchenik, 1998) evaluated the impact of coaching on over seventy participants at Amoco, which was at the time a Fortune 50 organization in the petrochemical industry. Based on ratings from participants and their superiors, those who participated

in coaching demonstrated the following, in comparison to a representative group of managers who did not participate in coaching: improved performance, usually from below average performance in a particular skill to above average performance; increased rate of advancement; higher average salary increases.

Although it is obviously difficult to control for all the variables affecting these outcomes, those who participated in the coaching study reported that their coaching was the single most significant factor in their improvements in these areas (Birkeland et al., 1997).

Coaching was one of the variables examined by Sloan (2001) in her research on executive education. She found that participants in executive education programs offered by leading universities and business schools who worked with a coach or mentor before or after their program, or both, reported substantially greater benefits in the following areas compared with participants who did not work with a coach or mentor: better self-confidence and improved skills in developing others, strategic thinking, operational management, and other areas.

In summary, although systematic research on coaching is not widespread, the available evidence strongly indicates that it is a powerful method for helping people learn new capabilities that can have a direct impact on important organizational outcomes.

### WHEN COACHING AND MENTORING ARE MOST BENEFICIAL

Compared with training courses, university programs, Web-based education, and most other management development options, coaching and mentoring are high-cost, high-impact, and high-value investments. However, because both are so popular, they may sometimes be used when better alternatives are available. To gain the greatest benefits from coaching, consider using it when the following characteristics are important (Peterson & Hicks, 1999):

#### **Customization Is Needed**

Because of its one-on-one nature, coaching can be automatically customized to the unique needs of the person being coached. Both the content

(what is learned) and the process (when, where, and how it is learned) can be customized. Thus, unique needs can be met in one process. For example, coaching could support a senior financial person who needs to learn greater assertiveness, political savvy, strategic thinking, and how to build better external relationships. This principle was demonstrated recently when top executives in a leading computer organization realized that their general managers had received very little leadership development. Because their audience had very different development needs, the organization implemented a large-scale coaching program to bring the general managers up to speed quickly.

Another consideration in choosing coaching is how well a customized learning approach fits with the organizational culture. A leading mutual fund organization determined that coaching was the development method of choice because of its distinctive fit with the organizational norms. Lawrence (1998) observed that our culture doesn't support group-oriented, systematic development efforts. She then described a culture characterized by a strong action orientation, self-sufficiency and independence, and an appreciation for novelty and idiosyncrasy, all of which are favorable to the personal and individual nature of coaching.

### **Learning Must Be Just-in-Time**

When the development need is urgent, coaching can almost always be arranged more quickly than other learning modes such as classroom training, university courses, or action learning. For example, a sales organization in a multinational medical supply company was suffering from a high failure rate in newly promoted sales managers. The group began to offer just-in-time coaching whenever anyone was promoted into that position. Another rapidly growing high-tech company had a poor track record of bringing in external managers until it started assigning a coach to each person on his or her first day on the job.

### **Little Time Is Available**

Coaching is Often recommended when a person's time is more valuable than the cost, such as with senior executives, financial gurus, and other key individuals. Coaching tends to provide the maximum learning for the time invested because the curriculum is continuously tailored exactly to

the topics and the level of the person. Group learning modes necessarily aim for a common denominator that introduces inefficiency in time commitments for any given individual. For example, a leading consulting firm offers coaching as the primary development tool for its 110 highest-performing senior partners.

### **Significant Results Are Necessary**

Well-designed coaching incorporates virtually all of the best principles of learning, more than any other method. It also provides a supportive relationship, which is often cited as one of the most powerful factors in significant personal change (Mahoney, 1991; Orlinsky & Howard, 1986). The multiple-session design provides for spaced practice, fine-tuning of skills, personal accountability, and continued strategizing around on-the-job application of skills. A financial services firm that was facing dramatic changes in its industry responded with an initiative to change its culture to move faster, make decisions quicker, and operate more strategically at a global level. Hoping to ensure positive role models and effective leadership to make this dramatic change quickly, it provided coaching for the fifteen people identified as most critical to the successful implementation of this new leadership style. In another case, a large-scale process was instituted by a traditional manufacturing organization attempting a significant strategic shift. The company provided three different coaching programs, each tailored to a specific audience of its twelve top executives, the next fifty senior leaders, and the remainder of its top three hundred managers. Both of these organizations chose coaching because they were facing significant challenges and had to achieve dramatic changes quickly.

### **Confidentiality Is Needed**

Coaching generally takes place in the context of a close, trusting relationship, where it is safe to discuss sensitive personal and business issues. For senior leaders in particular it provides a confidential and objective sounding board for issues that they are reluctant or unable to discuss with other members of their team.

## **Other Considerations**

Two other considerations are important in deciding when to use coaching:

### ***Topics Best Suited to Coaching and Mentoring***

Peterson (1993b) found that a well-designed coaching program was effective in enhancing skills and improving performance in a wide range of areas:

- Interpersonal skills, including relationship building, tact and sensitivity, assertiveness, conflict management, working across cultures, and influencing without authority
- Communication, including listening skills, presentations, and speaking with impact
- Leadership skills, including delegating, coaching and mentoring, and motivating others
- Certain cognitive skills, such as prioritizing, decision making, and strategic thinking
- Self-management skills, including time management, emotion and anger management, and work-life balance

What these topics have in common is a lack of universal rules or fact-based principles to follow. Each person's actions are based on his or her values, skills, and appraisal of the situation. A coach can help clarify values, build skills, and improve the person's ability to appraise the situation accurately. In contrast, formal instruction and other training methods are often more effective for factual topics with clear rules or legal guidelines (such as history, finance, technology, science). Nonetheless, for virtually all topics, it is often helpful to differentiate acquisition of skills and knowledge from real-world application. It is often best to learn the principles and methods of a topic, whether finance, marketing, or leadership, through books, lectures, and case discussion. But coaching is a powerful tool for helping people apply in the real world what they have learned in the classroom. As a caveat, it is important to point out that coaching is rarely appropriate for therapeutic issues such as depression, substance abuse, or marital problems. Such topics are better handled through a company's employee assistance program (EAP) or other counseling providers.

Mentoring is particularly well-suited to transferring personal insights and wisdom about how to be successful in an organization and any areas requiring experience and seasoned judgment, such as ethics, integrity, organizational politics, and courageous leadership. Mentoring is particularly recommended for organizations seeking to do the following:

- Accelerate the career progress of underrepresented groups, whether based on ethnicity, gender, background, or even functional area.
- Transmit the culture and values to newer managers. Mentoring can even be used to help change the culture, if it selectively emphasizes a few of the most critical values.
- Pass on the accumulated wisdom of seasoned leaders, especially in areas where personal insight and sound judgment are essential.

#### ***People Most Likely to Benefit***

Birkeland et al. (1997) found that the payoff from coaching was significantly greater for leaders who had been designated as having high potential than those deemed to be solid performers or at risk for derailment. Specifically, the high potentials received higher ratings on the amount of skill improvement from coaching and in their subsequent performance appraisals. Although there are many good reasons, as listed earlier, for offering coaching to a wide range of employees, organizations are advised to focus their efforts on high potential performers and highly valued employees in order to get the greatest return on their investments in coaching. Top priority candidates for coaching might be found among new promotions into critical roles; high potentials, especially from underrepresented populations; talented incumbents in roles with high failure rates; leaders responsible for major turnaround or change initiatives; highly valued employees where retention is an issue; and leaders facing difficult and unpredictable business challenges, such as managing mergers and acquisitions.

## DESIGNING AN INDIVIDUAL COACHING PROGRAM

There are four major considerations in designing a coaching program for an individual: identifying the participant, selecting and orienting

the coach, following a Well-designed coaching process, and providing appropriate supports for learning.

### **Identifying the Participant**

In addition to the general factors discussed in the preceding section, organizations are encouraged to develop specific criteria for determining who will receive coaching. One organization outlined a set of questions, including the following, that must be addressed before an individual can participate in coaching (Lawrence, 1998):

- Is there a genuine development need?
- Is that development need linked to business performance?
- Is the issue something the individual has control over, or is it symptomatic of a larger organizational problem that needs to be addressed on a broader scale?
- Is the person open to learning and feedback?
- Is the person motivated to change?
- Is coaching the most appropriate development option?

### **Selecting and Orienting the Coach**

It is not unusual to hear requests such as “We want a coach who’s been a manufacturing executive in the automobile industry, because that’s the type of person he’ll be coaching.” This is a common pitfall: trying to match participants with coaches on the basis of similar backgrounds and experiences rather than on the coach’s ability to help such a person. Instead of matching coaches and leaders according to surface similarities, two qualities are essential in the right coach.

#### ***Can the Coach Work Well with the Person?***

It is important to make sure that the coach can relate to the person and the world that person lives in. Find out how well the coach has worked with others in similar situations by asking the following questions:

- (1) What kinds of people have you worked with? What results did you achieve?
- (2) Where do you do your best work? With what kinds of people and topics do you work best?
- (3) Who would you turn down and why?

(The last question helps make sure the coach recognizes her own limits.)

***How Effectively Can the Coach Help the Person Develop?***

A coach should be able to walk a person through all the important steps of learning, as shown in the development pipeline. The following questions are useful in assessing a coach's approach to the learning process.

*How will you determine what the person needs to work on?* Evaluate how thoughtful and strategic the coach is in zeroing in on important issues. Pay attention to how coaches partner with others to plan the development priorities and process.

*How will you help the person learn new ways to do things?* The best coaches translate insights and good ideas into practical steps that build new capabilities and stronger performance in the real world.

*How will you ensure they get results?* Determine up front how coaches will help break old habits and put change into action. Find out what they will do to ensure what is learned is translated into real, sustainable change.

Once you have selected a coach, make sure that person understands the broader context, such as organizational culture and values, business environment, and strategic priorities. This background information will help ensure their coaching is more closely aligned with the organizational objectives. Discuss relevant ground rules and expectations with the coach as well, including confidentiality, communication, and involvement of other members of the team.

It is also worth examining the role of internal and external coaches. In the last few years, several organizations have hired professional coaches to serve full time. More often, internal coaches are human resource and organizational development professionals, or even managers who have some training or experience in coaching. External coaches are most appropriate in a few specific cases:

- When you need rapid learning and behavior change. Few organizations have internal coaches with the depth of skill and experience that is readily available among external coaches.
- For dealing with people who are resistant to change or who are cynical toward the coaching process. There is less risk if an external person fails as a coach.
- For relatively confidential or sensitive issues where the person does not want an internal person involved.

- When internal coaches are unavailable or in different locations.
- When internal coaches do not have the particular expertise that is desired.
- When an objective, independent viewpoint is critical.

In contrast, internal coaches are most appropriate in these cases:

- As part of regular, ongoing development activities, such as supporting a specific development program
- When deep knowledge of the personalities or relationships among a given cast of characters is important
- When knowledge of organizational politics or how things really get done inside the organization is critical

### **Following a Well-designed Coaching Process**

There are dozens of approaches to the coaching engagement itself, reflecting preferences for different assessment techniques, meeting formats (length of the coaching session and whether conducted in person, over the phone, or on-line), and philosophy of development. However, any well-designed coaching process should address the following issues.

#### ***Contracting***

There are several aspects of contracting. The first focuses on the content, outlining the purpose of the coaching, establishing specific learning goals, and setting clear expectations for how and when performance will improve. The second is procedural, defining various stakeholders and their roles, as well as clarifying guidelines for confidentiality and communications. Finally, contracting involves financial arrangements, such as fees, expenses, and billing schedules.

The contracting process often begins by identifying the key stakeholders, usually the coach, the person being coached, that person's superior boss or designated organizational sponsor, and the human resource contact. The coach should discuss expectations, roles, and responsibilities with each of them. For additional useful detail on the contracting process, consider *The Executive Coaching Handbook* (Executive Coaching Forum of Boston, 2000).

### **Coaching Sessions**

So that everyone gets the most value for the time actually spent in coaching sessions, coaches should have a strategy for identifying what parts of the development pipeline are constrained and what actions will have the greatest impact. As a result, it is difficult to provide a standard outline of what the coaching sessions should look like. There are typically three parts:

**The Opening.** In the very first meeting the opening is a chance to clarify expectations, solidify the working agenda, and get to know each other. This may be the first time the coach and the participant meet face to face, although they have usually been in communication with each other in arranging the coaching process. The coach needs to pay particular attention to building trust and rapport by understanding what the person hopes to accomplish through coaching. In subsequent meetings, the first part of each session allows time to reestablish that rapport, catch up on what has happened since the last session, and prioritize the agenda for the day. The development pipeline issue of accountability is brought into play when the coach asks for a report on what the individual has done on her action plan from the preceding session.

**Practice.** The middle segment is the heart of the coaching engagement. Here, through hands-on practice of real-world situations, instruction, modeling, feedback, and discussion, the coach facilitates the kind of learning that participants can carry back with them.

**Action Planning.** This is often the most neglected aspect of learning. It is relatively easy for participants to leave each session with new insights and skills and a genuine motivation to put them into action. Without a specific plan, however, they are often sidetracked. We encourage participants to visualize exactly what will happen when they try to put a new behavior into action. When do they plan to do it? How will they remember to do it? What will get in their way? What will they do to stay on track? How will they evaluate the outcome of their new action? How will they get feedback from others? When will they try it again? How will they modify or build on what they tried the next time they use it?

Real-World practice and accountability, the fourth and fifth parts of the development pipeline, are also addressed by the two following activities.

***On-the-Job Activities Between Sessions***

Between coaching sessions, participants are expected to apply what they have learned. Attention to this is essential for breaking old habits and establishing new ones. Participants need to be encouraged to push their comfort zone on a daily basis. Similar to an exercise program, regular activity is necessary to ensure fitness. For development, meaningful progress can be made in most areas with just five minutes a day of practice (Peterson & Hicks, 1995).

***Evaluation of Progress***

It is often assumed that a multirater feedback instrument is a useful way to measure progress in coaching. But such instruments rarely provide the level of specificity needed to capture the true impact of coaching. If a formal process for evaluating progress is desired, then consider using a completely customized rating form based on the agreed-upon learning objectives for the person. Such a form should be used immediately at the outset of coaching to provide a behavioral baseline. Subsequently, the survey could be used at three-month intervals or as desired. This approach has the advantages of brevity and of zeroing in on the exact behaviors of interest. It can be filled out by the person, the coach, the person's manager, and any other key stakeholders. Such a method is described in detail by Peterson (1993a, 1993b).

A less formal process of evaluating progress is to discuss progress periodically with each of the stakeholders. We recommend that participants regularly seek feedback, encouragement, and support from their organizational sponsors and share their own perspective on what they have learned and what progress they are making. In addition to helping participants gauge their progress, this ensures that others are aware of their progress in areas they may not be able to observe directly.

***Providing Supports for Learning***

Coaching works best when it does not stand alone but rather is part of a broader, orchestrated process of learning. There are multiple accountabilities in ensuring the continuous growth of a leader. In some cases, assigning a coach can inadvertently lead to an abdication or easing of those responsibilities. Some managers may feel they are let off the hook; the coach is

now responsible. Therefore it is important to outline clearly support roles to ensure that optimal learning takes place. The following recommendations to the person's manager, HR person, and any other organizational sponsors, will help enhance the impact of coaching.

- ***Have clear expectations.*** Even when expectations are clear at the outset, they frequently evolve over the coaching engagement. It is important to continue to communicate them.
- ***Provide ongoing feedback.*** It is important not to bombard the person with feedback at every opportunity, but periodic feedback is essential to work on how he is coming across. One of the best things sponsors can do is simply ask the person when and how he would like to discuss his progress and get feedback.
- ***Encourage and support.*** Learning new skills is often hard for managers, who are used to being competent and successful at most things they do. So it helps to provide encouragement and reinforcement simply for the effort they are putting into learning.
- ***Give room to experiment, try new things, and make mistakes.*** Anyone who works on significant new skills will use them awkwardly and inefficiently at first. Sometimes using new skills even leads to a temporary decrement in performance. It is important to give people the space they need to practice their new skills in real situations.

## DESIGNING AN ORGANIZATIONAL COACHING PROGRAM

In a survey of Global 1,000 organizations, fewer than 5 percent had any kind of systematic or coordinated approach to coaching (Peterson & Hicks, 1999). In fact, the use of coaching was so diffuse and decentralized that not one of those surveyed was willing even to estimate how much money his or her organization spent on coaching. Recently, however, organizations have realized the powerful role that coaching can play when channeled into supporting their strategic priorities. We are seeing a growing number of leading-edge corporations take steps to design a consistent process, target specific audiences and high-priority needs, and establish criteria for choosing an appropriate pool of coaches. Often, they see coaching as a focal point for introducing a new performance management process, accelerating organizational changes, or dealing with emerging priorities

such as improving retention of key talent. This section will guide you through some of the main considerations in designing a successful coaching program for your organization.

### **Define a Clear Purpose**

Given how popular coaching is, and how effective it is, it is easy to see it as a solution to a wide range of organizational needs. Like any major initiative, however, the solution should match the purpose. Any effort to implement a coaching program for your organization should begin with a clear definition of the purpose and rationale: What do you hope to accomplish? Why is coaching the method of choice? For example, coaching is likely to be beneficial when implementing a significant organizational change that requires new capabilities and new behaviors. However, because you want to use coaching where it offers the greatest leverage, the optimal solution might include coaching aimed at the primary leaders of the change along with hands-on training sessions for everyone and a new competency model reflected in 360-degree surveys and the performance appraisal process. As with any other intervention, a clear link to organizational strategy or business imperatives increases the odds of success.

### **Identify the Participants**

Your purpose will lead directly to the appropriate candidates for participation. One organization, in order to establish positive role models for the change, began with the most senior executives and then rolled out the coaching process one level at a time. If you are working with a large group of coaching participants, start with a smaller set of people to fine-tune the process and build momentum. As much as possible, start by working with volunteers who are respected in the organization, who will help improve the program rather than criticize it publicly, and who are likely to benefit visibly from coaching.

One financial services company realized, as stated by the organization's president, "We are growing at 30 percent each year and our people are growing 20 percent. They feel very good about how much they are learning, and yet our management talent is falling farther and farther behind every year." In this company, people were respected solely on the basis of their

competence and their performance. Any interest an individual might show in personal development was regarded as an admission of weakness. Although no one would admit it publicly, many leaders were starting to feel stretched to capacity. In this situation, the organization's HR leaders introduced coaching as a way to create a more positive image of development. They began by offering coaching on a completely volunteer basis to anyone at the director level and above. At the same time, members of the HR community actively campaigned a number of highly regarded leaders in critical positions to get them to enroll in coaching. As the program grew, they highlighted success stories. Although it began slowly, within three years demand was so high that the company had to limit participation in coaching to those with the greatest business need.

### **Identify and Manage the Coaches**

Until very recently few organizations managed the pool of coaches working with their managers in any way (Peterson & Hicks, 1999). Today, a growing number of organizations are attempting to manage coaching resources, including taking the following actions:

#### ***Carefully Selecting an Appropriate Pool of Coaches***

Selecting the right pool of coaches begins, once again, with a sense of the various objectives you wish to accomplish through coaching. Factors to consider in addition to the coach's capabilities, as outlined earlier, include fit with cultural values and familiarity with your organization and your industry. Once coaches are selected, consider publicizing a list of active coaches with a brief bio sheet and a summary of their specialty areas of coaching.

#### ***Providing an Orientation for New Coaches***

If you are launching a major coaching initiative, it is relatively easy to bring in all the coaches for a day or a half-day orientation to the organization. One leading consulting firm chose thirty coaches to work with its top one hundred leaders. There was a daylong orientation session that covered organizational history, culture and values, current business and competitive environment, strategic direction, relevant HR policies and practices, an overview of the target audience, and expectations for how the organization wanted to work with the coaches (including confidentiality,

communications, and roles). The organization also holds periodic update meetings. Although these meetings are an additional cost, the group claims that the benefits, such as greater alignment between the coaches and organizational priorities, are well worth it.

### ***Asking Coaches for Feedback***

Either formally or informally, it is important to seek periodic feedback and input from coaches working inside your organization. For example, find out what they see as most effective techniques for working with your leaders, what they are learning about the organization and its talent, where they see gaps, and what else they might recommend.

### ***Evaluating- the Coaches' Performance***

Based on the purpose of the coaching, identify who can most appropriately evaluate progress against the desired outcomes. For example, if the purpose is to enhance insight and personal effectiveness, the participant may be the ideal source. If the purpose is to improve performance, the participant and his or her superior might be interviewed. If the purpose is a broader strategic agenda, key stakeholders might rate the group's progress as a whole. Keep in mind that evaluation does not have to occur only at the end of the project. Regular monitoring can help you make midstream corrections that will ultimately lead to a better outcome.

### **Design the Process**

The basic steps in the coaching process are outlined earlier and can be adapted relatively easily to a companywide program. One additional factor arises from the scope of such an endeavor: simply managing and administering the project. Like any other program, it is necessary to keep track of eligible candidates, actual participants, the pool of coaches, financial arrangements, and other details. If specific instruments or tools, such as multirater feedback, are used, they need to be coordinated smoothly. Several years ago, a coaching program being rolled out by a fast-paced Internet company failed miserably simply because its 360-degree survey process was so poorly implemented that participants gave up in frustration. In terms of other administrative tasks, you may want to track everyone's

learning objectives, progress, and accomplishments. A further level of record-keeping entails tracking participants' progress in the organization for several years after their programs in order to determine the long-term impact of coaching.

A primary pitfall of large-scale coaching programs is building in too much standardization as a way to manage the process. Customization, one of the chief values of coaching, can be overshadowed by an organization's need for structure and consistency. For example, it is common for organizations to mandate multirater feedback. In one organization we worked with, several managers were required to complete a similar 360-degree feedback survey three times—once as part of a division-wide development process, once as members of a high potential program, and yet again if they were interested in individual coaching. This kind of overkill ignores the principle that the coaching process should be customized to each person. Even when the organization wants to ensure minimum standards for consistency, the focus should be on general process and desired outcomes, not on a lock-step procedure. For example, it is important that people identify clear goals for their coaching, so the organization might require submitting a set of goals and a careful rationale. Such goals can be determined, however, by reflection and self-examination, personal interest, 360-degree feedback, management recommendations, organizational need, or by filling out a self-rating checklist against a relevant competency model. It is also important to realize that one's goals may change as a result of the coaching, and to allow for such an evolution.

The opposite end of the customization spectrum is reflected in the menu of coaching options put together by a leading telecommunications company for its general managers and vice presidents. As a result of an increasingly competitive landscape, senior executives were encouraging all members of this group to be more proactive about upgrading their skills. Their coaching menu includes such items as a multirater feedback and development planning session; a high impact program, where the coach works intensively with the person for several sessions over a six-week period; a skills coaching package, similar to a one-on-one training program, with a clearly defined learning objective; a leadership improvement package, which includes a broad-based leadership assessment and a long-term coaching relationship; an observation process, where the coach shadows

the person as he engages in a number of important activities and then offer feedback, observations, and advice; and a “build-your-own” program where the manager sits down with a coach and designs a personalized coaching process from scratch.

A second potential pitfall for organizations is over-engineering the beginning of the coaching program (matching coaches and participants, assessing needs, contracting) and then essentially neglecting the actual learning and change process that occurs during and between coaching sessions. This seems to happen because it is relatively easy to define key steps for gathering feedback and for writing objectives but far more difficult to quantify the steps in learning and applying a new skill. In order to provide better balance and drive the learning process to completion, organizations should strive to address each component of the necessary conditions for change as outlined in the development pipeline (Hicks & Peterson, 1999a). Druckman and Bjork (1991) raise a similar concern when they point out that most development programs tend to emphasize skill acquisition over skill application, even though skill application is the ultimate goal.<sup>4</sup>

In one example, Coleman (2000) falls prey to this pitfall. His presentation outlines a nine-step coaching process in which “regular meetings with the coachee” (p. 3) is just one step. The other eight steps clearly address the insight, motivation, and accountability sections of the development pipeline. In addition, he deals at length with how to manage the coaching relationship with the client. However, there is very little mention of how to help people sharpen their skills or acquire new capabilities, and nothing at all on how to transfer those skills to real-world practice. Unfortunately, Coleman is not alone in this regard.

### **Evaluate Outcomes**

Finally, organizations should evaluate the impact of the coaching. We were surprised by our finding (Peterson & Hicks, 1999) that few organizations were measuring coaching outcomes. Those surveyed often described their belief that coaching was known to be effective, and that was sufficient. However, coaching can be used for a wide variety of objectives, and we encourage organizations to measure how effectively it is achieving their specific goals. For example, an important East Coast financial services

firm was spending over a million dollars a year on coaching for its senior executives. When a new head of HR was appointed, she surveyed those who had participated in the process. Their response was unanimously positive. But when she surveyed the managers of those participants, they were rarely able to point to any observable outcomes. Our perspective is that if the coaching was intended as a retention strategy, it was effective. Participants found personal value and were pleased that the company was investing in them. But if the purpose of coaching was to improve performance, then it was less than successful. That was the conclusion of the new HR head, too, who promptly set up a new procedure for determining who would receive coaching and how it would be evaluated. One unintended but intriguing consequence was that several of the executives then negotiated for personal coaches as part of their executive compensation package.

### DESIGNING AN ORGANIZATIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM

Many of the considerations for implementing a mentoring program are similar to those for a coaching program, such as having a clear purpose, planning ahead for the tremendous administrative tasks involved in managing a project with many different players, and providing for ongoing evaluation of the process and its outcomes. However, there are several critical differences that warrant separate treatment.

First, most mentoring programs are staffed internally, usually by senior managers.<sup>5</sup> This necessitates different selection criteria for the mentors than for coaches. Primary considerations include these: having something important and useful to share with others, credibility inside the organization, willingness to spend time sharing their knowledge, and basic interpersonal and communications skills. Once selected, most mentors will benefit from training in active listening and other fundamental coaching skills.

Second, mentors usually benefit from having a clear road map to follow. Miller and Costantino (1999) emphasize that successful mentoring programs provide clear roles and expectations and follow well established practices regarding how often to meet, what types of topics to discuss, and how to manage mentoring conversations.

Third, the reality in mentoring is that the protégé is more likely to be driving the process than the mentor or the two of them together. Participants need to understand their role in ensuring that the relationship continues in a productive fashion. Because mentors are essentially volunteers, they are more likely to continue their involvement if they get something out of the process and feel their time is well spent. It is essential to provide participants with guidelines on how to work the process and make sure that the benefits are mutual—if organizations wish to see the program succeed. In fact, explicitly designing reciprocal mentoring programs is a growing trend.

In essence, these last two points suggest that mentoring programs should begin with separate workshops for training mentors to be effective coaches and for training participants to be effective self-guided learners and partners in the mentoring process. Further, providing them with ongoing support is critical. Grewe and Lassiter (2000) used regular communications, including follow-up phone calls and monthly e-mail newsletters, to answer questions that would arise. Regular meetings between participants and between mentors provide a vehicle for maintaining focus and allowing people to share what they are learning with others.

Finally, one-on-one conversations, so integral to the coaching engagement, are rarely the primary way that people benefit from mentoring. It is common for organizations to design mentoring programs that recommend a two-hour meeting each month. One of the most common reasons that mentoring programs fail is that mentors find it too difficult to keep these regular time commitments. In personal conversations with participants in mentor programs, they often cite exposure to senior management activities as one of the primary benefits of working with a mentor several levels above them in the organization. Being able to shadow a mentor through significant events in their work lives, and then discuss them afterwards, has a dramatic impact on learning. For example, one marketing manager was given the opportunity to attend a worldwide meeting of her company's top executives. She was impressed with their intense focus on financial metrics and what she described as mundane operational issues. She walked away with much greater insight into how she could focus her own activities to add more value to the company. Certainly, mentoring participants can benefit from many types of activities, but our suggestion

is to focus the mentoring on broader exposure and the ensuing dialogue about real-time issues.

## CONCLUSION

Until science allows us to download new capabilities directly into people-as depicted in the movie *The Matrix*-coaching and mentoring are arguably the best methods we have for helping people learn. In fact, coaching and mentoring are ideally suited to today's times. In a world where many leaders are hungry for learning, overwhelmed with their workload, and confronted by new challenges every day, coaching provides

- Highly efficient, just-in-time learning for managers who never have enough time
- Practical, real-world solutions for people confronted by new challenges every day
- A safe, supportive environment where it is acceptable to take risks and try new things
- A caring, supportive relationship that allows people to explore difficult issues and ask tough questions about what is really important

Although coaching and mentoring often require significant investment in time, money, and energy, the substantial returns (Birkeland et al., 1997; Manchester Consulting, 2000; Peterson, 1993) clearly warrant the expenditure whenever better performance is critical to organizational success. And because talent has become the most critical variable for many organizations, those that excel at coaching and mentoring are most likely to thrive.



## Notes

1. No widely accepted definition of coaching and mentoring has yet emerged (Peterson & Hicks, 1999). I often advise clients not to worry about the terminology and simply use the language that makes the most sense in their organization. Then, regardless of the label, focus on helping people gain insight, enhance their capabilities, and improve their performance.
2. See Peterson (1996) for a case study of the coaching process and the resulting benefits for one individual, featuring commentary from her performance appraisals immediately before and after her coaching experience.

3. My personal recommendation regarding confidentiality is for the coaching process to be as open as possible, similar to how we might view a person attending a workshop or a university program. Of course, legal and professional standards must be followed, such as those involving psychological instrumentation and assessment results. In addition, it is critical to respect the client's desire for confidentiality on specific topics. Beyond those areas, I encourage people to talk openly about their coaching objectives and their own progress. This demonstrates a genuine commitment and facilitates additional feedback that is essential to effective learning.
4. Chapter Three in their book (Druckman & Bjork, 1991) is highly recommended for its excellent distillation of research on the techniques that actually facilitate transfer and generalization of new skills.
5. With the rise of the Internet, questions about how to manage Generation X, and concerns about retaining and advancing individuals who are members of minority groups, several organizations have reported an increasing use of younger mentors to coach older managers. Nostrand (2000) uses the term *reverse mentoring* to describe Procter & Gamble's program, which provides female mentors to more seasoned male managers.

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