# THE COACHING MANAGER

## *Developing Top Talent in Business*

### Third Edition

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# Whither the Coaching Manager

Do managers really deliver anything of value to their companies and their teams, or do they just get in the way? This is a question that has crossed the minds of nearly everyone who has worked in an organization for even a brief period of time. Depending upon the manager, sometimes the answer is all too clear. They just get in the way. But seriously, can we stop there? Luckily, Google didn't.

Google actually did try to avoid having managers for a brief period early in its history. As a company with a strong cultural value of autonomy, a belief in technical expertise, and a belief in the ability of people of good will to work things out, perhaps managers were really not necessary. However, it didn't work terribly well. Things seem to go a bit more smoothly in many cases when an effective manager is involved. But, what does that mean? That what they do actually adds value? They did what Google does best, set about the task of rigorously studying a question and gathering hard data to determine the answer (Bock, 2015; Garvin, 2013).

In fact, they did confirm that "good managers" indeed have a positive, measurable impact on their teams. They made a sufficiently convincing quantitative argument that Google's data-driven engineers bought into the notion that management is indeed a valuable role in the company, as long as they were not micromanaging. To make sure that doesn't happen, each manager may have as many as 30 direct reports (Garvin, 2013). Managers

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really don't have time to meddle too much under such circumstances. They have to give their people real autonomy, but that does not mean that they can just ignore the people who report to them. So what *should* they do? Box 1.1 tells the story.

The most important attribute Google found was that of being a good coach. Bock (2015, p. 195) goes on to say:

> We now had a prescription for building great managers, but it was a list of, quite frankly, pretty dull, non-controversial statements. To make it meaningful and, more important, something that would improve the performance of the company, we had to be more specific. For example, of course the best managers are good coaches! Superficially this seems obvious, but most managers, if they have regular one-on-one meetings at all just show up and ask "what's going on with you this week?" Most don't hold regular one-on-one meetings where they partner with the employee to diagnose problems and together come up with ideas tailored to the employee's specific strengths. Most don't combine praise and areas to work on. The specific prescription for managers is to prepare for meetings by thinking hard about employee's individual strengths and the unique circumstances they face, and then use the meeting to ask questions rather than dictate answers.

### Box 1.1 — What Good Managers Should Be Doing at Google (Bock, 2015)

1. Be a good coach.
2. Empower the team and do not micromanage.
3. Express interest/concern for team members' success and personal well-being.
4. Be very productive/results oriented.
5. Be a good communicator—listen and share information.
6. Help the team with career development.
7. Have a clear vision/strategy for the team.
8. Have important technical skills that help them advise the team.

It is important to note that Google explored the question of whether or not managers have value by taking the null hypothesis approach of trying to prove that they don't. They couldn't do it. However, again, we know that most of you, including ourselves, from time to time have *felt* as though managers have little to add. We would submit that just as Google found, too many managers don't do what is described above by Laszlo Bock (2015). When they do however, the results can be quite powerful. We would submit that the power of that effect is likely to be growing. Why?

## Coaching in an Uncertain World

Look carefully at Bock's description of what coaching actually is, as practiced at Google. Several key points stand out. First, it is a normal and frequently practiced activity that takes place between a manager and a direct report. It happens. We're not talking "lip service" here. Second, it involves a sense of partnership. It is not strictly speaking a "top-down" based activity. Responsibility for it is shared between the parties. Third, it involves thinking about the employees' strengths and the *circumstances they face*. Fourth, the meeting is used for inquiry and exploration, rather than the dictating of answers. We would like to explore the last two points in a bit more detail.

Most companies are very interested in creative innovation these days. By its very nature, the process of innovation will make at least some of our skills obsolete. Things change, we have an existing set of competencies, but because things changed, that set of competencies has to change. We can predict that this is likely to happen based on past experience, but we can't know for sure what form those changes and needed skill sets are likely to take. The specifics are not knowable.

We're fortunate to have been influenced at Babson College over the past few years by a set of ideas, initially proposed by Saravasthy (2008) and subsequently elaborated by a variety of other authors (Brown, Kiefer, & Schlesinger, 2014; Neck, 2011) that can help us better understand why the importance of the coach role is likely to be growing.

As we just proposed, it is very difficult any longer for us to cling to a linear or predictive notion of career and skill development (Brown et al., 2014). Yes, we can predict that certain professions and jobs are likely to continue to be with us. We can predict with some certainty many of the requirements for entering the professions of accounting and engineering. However, can we predict the kinds of skills these professionals are likely to need 5 to 10 years in the future? Given the pace of change in these two

fields, as well as many others, it is very difficult to predict. And of course, building skills in a college program in engineering is not sufficient for individuals headed for careers in engineering consulting, management, or entrepreneurship. Technological advances in engineering are likely to greatly alter the way engineering is actually done in the future. Yes, we can't know for certain what those changes will be like. How are we to come to grips with such a conundrum? Luckily, what is known as "prediction logic" is not the only way to go.

"Creation logic" evolved from the observation of entrepreneurs in action and others operating under conditions of uncertainty. Contrary to popular belief, entrepreneurs are less likely to "bet the farm" than one might imagine. Typically, entrepreneurs take a more measured approach. They start with an idea, experiment with the idea, reflect on what they have learned, and iterate. Their experiments tend to be modest and involve "affordable" loss. Betting the farm can be a ticket for disaster if one places the wrong beg. Further, the notion of a massive risk implies that one is ready to take it. Yet, under conditions of uncertainty, that makes no sense. Small actions accompanied by learning from those actions allows for continuous refinement of one's ideas.

Brown, Keifer, and Schlesinger (2014) propose that the same logic applies to people and their careers. Many people may have passion and a sense of personal direction. Yet, they still have to link those passions with opportunities, which are evolving if not being disrupted. At the same time, they have to connect their skill development with opportunities that may not be fully clear at any given time.

We suggest then that both companies and people need to be innovative and constantly learning if they are to thrive. Classroom learning, though very important (to us in particular since we're teachers) does not readily adapt itself to either challenge. The classroom can help, but the classroom is not well suited to harvesting the immediate lessons from experience that both require. It is also the case that the classroom, even a well-run, can't deliver quite the sense of reality and urgency that we experience when trying to get something done at work. At work, you are quite likely to try your best if you are in the right job. Even if you are working for a very supportive manager, the stakes are still high. Learning while at work, from work experiences, can provide very memorable opportunities to confront oneself, one's strengths and weaknesses, and learn how to make the most out of both. Experience tells us that the best way to learn from those compelling experiences is through conversations to help make sense of what is happening and what they are learning. In other words, the link between innovation

and personal development is . . . coaching. We'll now look more closely at the mechanism of learning in coaching.

## The Coaching Manager Model and Developmental Coaching

Before delving further into the coaching manager model we're going to share, let us first tell you how we arrived at the conclusions that you're going to see in this book. Over the past 15 years, we have worked with more than 5,000 practicing managers and entrepreneurs engaged in various sorts of coaching and talent development. (We've worked with an additional 2,000 or so since the first edition.) In addition, we've had extensive opportunities to talk with business leaders, human resource professionals, and learning and development specialists in some of our best business and not-for-profit organizations. (Some of those conversations, which are beyond the scope of this book, are described in Hunt & Weintraub, 2007.) We have continued to learn from them about learning from experience and how managers can build an organizational capability by encouraging a coaching culture in their teams and units.

At the core of this capability is the conversation, what we describe as the *coaching dialogue*. The coaching dialogue is far more than just an occasion for feedback for an employee: It is the cornerstone of developmental coaching. We say "developmental coaching" because the goal of the activity we'll describe is to promote an employee's growth in on the job effectiveness. This has two very positive outcomes. First, the employees get something out of it in that their skill base will likely grow, making them more employable and better candidates to achieve whatever their ambitions might be. It is also likely we would add to enhance their sense of satisfaction on the job. The other outcome is the enhanced ability of a team or organization to do work, to succeed. Developmental coaching builds the capacity of both people and organizations. It is far more than just telling someone where they stand or how they are doing.

In this coaching dialogue, two individuals, for our purposes a coaching manager and one of his or her reports, meet formally or informally to discuss a challenge/problem/task on which the employee is working. Rather than meeting only to discuss business *results,* the participants also talk about *how* the employee is going about trying to achieve those results. They talk about the process of getting there, as well as the ultimate goal. It is those conversations about process, actions, and decisions that the employee

makes while trying to deal with the challenge from which the employee can draw the lessons of experience.

We'll provide an overview of the Coaching Manager Model in Chapter 2 and then provide detailed discussions of its various components in subsequent chapters. For the purposes of this chapter, however, let's describe it as follows. In a coaching dialogue, the manager seeks, often through the use of questions, to encourage the employee to reflect on his or her actions—to examine his or her actions critically with an eye toward understanding the gaps between actual and desired performance. While individuals can critically reflect on their performance in isolation, reflection in the company of another interested party is more powerful, as we'll describe in some detail. Reflection by itself, however, may not be enough to give the employee a full understanding of his or her actions and their role in achieving the desired outcomes.

It may be necessary for the coaching manager to provide feedback to help the employee get a clearer sense of his or her actions, and at times, it may be helpful to provide some needed advice. The latter tactic, however, is used carefully so as not to undermine the employee's sense of ownership for next steps and further improvements. You can see immediately that there is some art to this on the part of the manager. A good coaching manager develops a sense of when to jump in and provide feedback and advice and when to step back and let his or her employees think things through. (This dilemma will seem very familiar to parents, teachers, and athletic coaches.) In most instances, one might think that the manager's own style and timing will dictate a response to that question. A skilled coaching manager, though, tries to make that judgment call based on the employee's needs, not the manager's predilections.

We are acutely aware that the preceding paragraph might already scare off some folks who are interested in improving their ability to coach their people. Please don't be frightened! You don't have to be perfect at this stuff to be effective. You have to be OK. Intent does matter here, along with your ability to receive feedback from those you coach. In reality, the relationship, as perceived by both parties, is just as important if not more important than the techniques of coaching. Recent research, which we'll rely on later in this and in several subsequent chapters has confirmed this (Gregory & Levy, 2011). If you are genuinely trying to help and you occasionally jump in too quickly, and if you've let your people know that you need their help to help them, you'll do just fine. Yes, practice does help. Perfection, though, is not what you're trying to achieve. This is a very human process.

As such, in addition to some basic skills, trust between the parties here is obviously a critically important enabling factor (Gregory & Levy, 2011).

That's why intent is so important. If you are really trying to help, not to punish, if you really do want to know what is happening with your people and their work, and if you behave accordingly (we'll talk about this in great detail), sufficient trust will materialize in your relationships with your people for coaching to take place. (Of course, intent by itself will not be enough if you are inadvertently undermining your efforts to build trust by behaving in a fashion that contradicts that intent. This can happen without your awareness.)

The best way to learn to coach, and to build trust in your relationships with your people, is to try coaching. Acquaint yourself with the basics of the developmental coaching model; let your people know what you're trying to do, assuming you're clear about what that is, and ask for their feedback.

But here's where the anxiety begins to build. Why? Too many managers have the wrong mental models about coaching from years of being taught that coaching is a tool for dealing with serious performance problems. When an employee has a severe, persistent performance problem, the model of coaching we have described may not work. Such coaching is unfortunately often a warning, rather than a learning-oriented conversation. That is understandable. Sometimes that is the only tool left for even the best managers because the employee simply isn't able to meet basic standards for a job. Something has to be done. But that is not developmental coaching. The employee in such a situation may be more motivated to cover up problems than talk about them. Trust may be minimal or even absent, since the manager naturally will have to represent the interests of the organization, not the employee. The employee would prefer otherwise. Tension builds. Communication breaks down. This is what most managers associate with coaching. Sounds like fun, right? Let us stress that we know you do have to provide such coaching from time to time if you're a manager. The folks at Google might even disagree with our emphasis here because they view coaching poor performers as being a real opportunity for improvement (Bock, 2015). Regardless, in our experience, this is still going to be tough going. We will, however, try to address this difficult area later in the book.

Here's what the managers we've talked with, those who use coaching on a daily basis, tell us: Don't devote all your precious time just to coaching individuals with performance problems. How much attention do your good and best employees receive? Probably they receive very little, far less than they deserve. But they don't cause any trouble. And you're busy. But—and this is the key part—those good and great employees are the ones most likely to help your business. They are probably the most engaged in the work. They probably have good ideas or have a good idea of where the

problems lie. They are also the ones who are most likely to *want* to engage in the kind of developmental work described in this book. But too often they don't get that kind of attention. Coaching these people, the people who can help your business and who want to learn, is a very different experience from coaching someone who is unhappy with the job, with you, with the company, with his or her performance, with your performance, or with all of the above.

Here's how we define coaching as applied to the Coaching Manager: *An ongoing dialogue to accelerate learning and development with the goal of improving performance now and in the future.* As you'll see, we will build upon a more general model of developmental coaching. However, our challenge is to bring the concepts from that field to better understand how developmental coaching is our focus in this book is on developmental coaching as practiced by a manager at work in an organization. However, it is well known and rooted in common experience that we can actually see and experience such developmental conversations in a variety of relationships, with friends, colleagues, individuals outside the organization and professionals.

If you think back over your own development, you'll almost certainly recognize a myriad of folks who have listened and tried to help you figure out a tough but important problem. What we have learned in our research is that coaching managers are able to make that happen within the employee/manager relationship that can potentially increase its impact greatly if for no other reason than because we spend so much of our time at work. Before looking further at the nature of developmental coaching, let us provide a bit of background with regard to where coaching fits in with other experiences that are also developmental in nature.

## Coaching and Learning

The underlying theory behind how adults learn and adapt and how they can in turn help organizations learn and adapt is not a new one, but it is one that has thoroughly withstood the tests of time. Learning is more than just action, though action is part of learning. Wolfe and Kolb (1984) have described a useful way to understand learning as requiring four interrelated steps. To learn, the individual must act and then make sense of the action and its implications with an eye toward developing increased competence. Action, Step 1 in the learning process, creates experience that registers with the actor in Step 2. This is where development stops in most organizations (Hicks & Peterson, 1997). Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that anything has been learned up to this point in the process.

If the experience of an action is subject to self-reflection, discussion, and external feedback, in Step 3 in the process, it is possible for the individual to then draw new conclusions about the nature and effect of that action. The learner generates a new set of ideas, a new theory if you will, regarding the action. The learner thinks about what worked and what didn't work, why, and what might be tried differently. The new theory is subject to experimental testing, in Step 4, as the individual strives to improve his or her performance.

Say that you are trying to help a new product development team get its meeting habits started in the right way. Based on your previous experience, you start with the assumption that a tightly structured agenda can help a group stick to its task. You bring in such an agenda to the first meeting and find that a number of the more creative members of this new team seem to just want to chat with each other. Frustrated, you get angry and become more directive. Your manager, a gifted coach, happens to be at the meeting to present a brief overview on the state of the business. After the meeting, he takes a few minutes to ask you for your thoughts about how it went. You express frustration at your inability to get the crazy creative types to stay on track. He asks you whether you've ever worked with people like this before, and you say no. You then wonder aloud whether your approach to the creative types was perhaps not all that helpful. Your boss, agreeing with you, gives you some feedback to the effect that in the meeting the creative types seemed to stop paying attention when you became more forceful and directive. A new theory about what is going on occurs to you. Your previous model of effective team leadership, a model that had always worked in the past, may need to be modified. Maybe you need to encourage a team like this to be a little more social with one another as a way of getting started. You resolve to try this next time. You leave this coaching interaction feeling as though you have gained a useful insight into how different kinds of teams run. Yes, you wish it had gone better, but you at least have some sense of what to try next time. Importantly, you've also recognized that you have to understand that you'll be learning in this situation. You're likely to make some mistakes, but in the long run, you need to learn to deal with these kinds of team members.

In this example, you have learned to expand your own set of assumptions about how to be an effective team leader. You don't just keep doing more of what you normally do. Such automatic behavior, continuing to do what we know even when it doesn't work, seems to reflect human nature to a degree, but it is also a hallmark of a failure to learn (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Not surprisingly, perhaps, it is all too common in the workplace. We do the same thing over and over again, hoping that this time it will work

but ready to blame someone else if it doesn't. (Or we tell someone who has failed to try again, without talking about what he or she might do differently next time.)

A coaching or learning-oriented discussion provides the parties, both managers and employees, an opportunity to stop and think about what they are doing in the here and now. Coaching helps people extract knowledge from such readily available learning opportunities, think about what is novel or important (and, in most businesses these days, there is plenty of that), and grow "in place." When coaching occurs as we have described it here, the employees feel they are learning, and they are. Employees are also being directly challenged to keep improving their performance, and in that sense, they are being challenged to work at even higher levels of effectiveness. Their performance, and ultimately the firm's competitiveness, can improve in the process. Again, this may seem like common sense. So, what is the problem?

## Why don't more managers coach?

There is a great deal of confusion in the business world about the role that organizations and their managers can and should play in the development of their employees. Who is responsible for personal development, the employee or the company? Why should organizations even concern themselves with such issues? Indeed, shouldn't employees just be ready to do their jobs without all this? Why should employees look to their companies to help "educate" them? Would they even trust their companies to provide such help beyond sending them to formal classroom trainings? This confusion has fostered, we believe, inactivity. Managers don't coach, and employees don't ask for coaching. In the world of business, we have created a stigma against learning and against coaching for both the manager and the employee.

We have asked the following question in our coach-training sessions since 1996: "How many of you have had your manager devote 100% of a 60-minute (or even a 30-minute) block of time to observing you work on some task and then spend an additional 30 minutes or so talking with you about what he or she saw, in a way you really felt promoted your growth?" Although we occasionally do see a hand go up, most of the time, we do not. We're more likely to hear snickers.

Then, we hear the gamut of "anti-coaching manager stories": "I found out I'd gotten my raise when it came in my check. I have no idea what I did to deserve that." (We have heard that story from participants in our leadership programs. Little did we know that it would in fact happen to one of

us in 2007. No one is immune to poor management, not even the authors of this book.) "I haven't seen or talked to my manager in 6 months. I guess that means I'm doing OK." "I had my performance appraisal over the phone." Our personal favorite: "Coaching is for wimps." We should add that the sample of companies from which participants in our training programs are drawn includes some of the best on the planet. If you're a CEO reading this book and you think your managers are coaching, you might want to back up that assumption with some hard data. These anecdotal observations that developmental coaching, at least as we define it below, is rarely practiced are supported by a substantial body of research (Lombardo & Eichanger, 2001).

If the boss, the person with formal power, signals that she or he isn't interested in employees' development, and if this is a pretty common observation, what's the logical response on the part of employees? Most will lower their expectations. A self-fulfilling prophecy is the result. Little coaching takes place, so people don't expect to be coached even though they may wish otherwise. They don't expect coaching, so they don't ask for it—and not surprisingly, because they don't ask, they don't get it. To close the loop, if they don't ask for it, their managers will think they don't want it.

Furthermore, if they were to request coaching from their managers, they would quite likely be talking with people who don't really know how to coach or are afraid to coach. The mental models that both parties are likely to hold of coaching—that it is reserved for poor performers, not for good ones, as we discussed above—don't help. And so it goes. (Of course, if people work for a manager who believes that coaching is for wimps, they'll rightly be afraid to ask.)

Contrast this view with an earlier and more progressive vision put forth by management authors Veered and Selman (1989). Ahead of their time, they speculated that (a) if managers and organizations actually encouraged people to ask for coaching, (b) if managers made them feel safe in doing so, and (c) if managers could get used to coaching, a potent internal market for coaching would emerge. Employees would start to expect and even demand to be coached, and the stigma, the fear of retribution for admitting that they don't know something, would disappear rather quickly. Our experience tends to support this perspective.

We should note of course that in some organizations, performance appraisal and compensation systems, as well as the attitudes of some misguided senior managers, can actively discourage coaching. We've heard participants in our programs quote the jab they may have received from a senior organizational leader to the effect of "Why are you spending all that time talking with your people?" more than once. The best possible

comeback is "because it gets results." So, while we admit that various human resource practices can discourage coaching if poorly executed, we believe that it is too easy to blame the entire problem on such antiquated policies and attitudes. Even in companies that actively encourage coaching, you can find many managers who don't explore its possibilities.

We know that most people want to learn (McGregor, 1985; Senge, 1990). Study after study shows that meaningful work, challenge, learning, and career development are high on the list of factors that workers look for in their relationships with employers. There is growing evidence that learning is an even more important motivator for the so-called millennial generation of workers (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2013). The coaching managers we have talked to tell us that it is indeed possible to tap all that pent-up motivation. They strive to create conditions under which their employees feel relatively comfortable asking for coaching. Some coaching managers have been able to achieve this even while working in companies not necessarily known for promoting the development of employees. The important question here is, *Why?* What's your motivation, on a personal level but perhaps most important on a business level? At the close of this chapter, we will challenge you to consider what it would mean for you, and for your team/organization, if you were to more actively involve yourself in support of talent development, through talking with your direct reports. That's our sales pitch. But it's not all on your shoulders. Note we're saying that coaching—developmental coaching—is a co-created activity. You have to make it possible, but it's not solely up to you.

## It's the Relationship That Matters

This then brings us back to the relationship you have with your direct reports. As we stated earlier and will discuss further in the book, our interviews with coaching managers frequently took us into a discussion of how these relationships work. We're going to share much more about what we learned in subsequent chapters. However, we're happy to have as a new resource some important work that took place at Proctor and Gamble and the University of Akron. The investigators Jane Gregory and Paul Levy (2011) were able to use a very robust methodology to study the manager–employee relationship with regard to coaching. They used large scale survey data from two sources, managers and their direct reports. They were then able to rely not only on managers' so-called self-assessment, but to find out how manager perceptions compared with employee perceptions and relate the two. In brief, they found the following:

Managers self-assessments of their own "emotional intelligence" overall (which we'll discuss later) did not predict whether or not employees experienced the relationship as a positive context for learning. Employee perceptions of managers' *empathy* though did. The question here is whether or not your direct reports believe that you try to understand their needs and problems from their perspective, not just form the company's perspective. They also found that *trust* predicted how the relationship was experienced. Could the employees talk frankly about their problems and challenges without fear of being treated unfairly because of their candor? Further, they found that individual consideration predicted a more successful coaching relationship. This variable has to do with whether or not the employee perceives that the supervisor is genuinely interested in his or her development as an individual. Finally, the nature of the *feedback environment,* whether or not the supervisor himself or herself was open to feedback most specifically was an important predictor of the effectiveness of the coaching taking place. These then seem to be the key characteristics of an effective manager–employee relationship where coaching and learning are concerned.

## Coaching Isn't the Same as Mentoring

When we start talking about the importance of the relationship though, we frequently run into some confusion about the distinction between coaching and mentor; confusion is the source of some anxiety. Many managers are concerned that coaching, like mentoring, will take a great deal of time and emotional energy. The thought of having to participate in a long-term emotional relationship is anxiety provoking. We do believe that coaching can create better relationships between employees and managers. However, coaching relationships don't have to be emotionally intense to create an effective context for learning and development.

Coaching is not the same as mentoring (Kram, 1985; Murphy & Kram, 2014; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Mentoring typically involves a more ongoing relationship, one with a significant emotional component to it. We talked above about the importance of high-quality, trusting relationships between manager and employee. Affection and emotional intimacy, however, are not required. Yes, it can be very valuable to like the people with whom you spend your working days and nights. It is very important to think of the people who work for you as humans, not as cogs in the wheel of industry. It is, however, a matter of degree. We would stress that it is possible to engage in helpful developmental coaching with someone who works for you, even though you don't know much about his or her personal life and may only see him or her

at work. It is possible to utilize the techniques and strategies of developmental coaching with someone with whom you may work for only a short period of time, if you create the proper expectations and context.

As our colleague, Wendy Murphy explained in a recent interview, coaching is instrumental, meaning it is a way of relating, or perhaps a method. It may be used by mentors, or it may not. In Figure 1.1, we present a brief comparison of the two kinds of relationships, drawing on the work of Murphy and Kram (2015).

Mentors then also do much more than coach and engage in activities that at times are quite different from those of a manager. Perhaps most important, they are usually not "in the trenches" with their protégés. The manager may well be. Our research suggests that coaching can take place in a rather brief episode, sometimes as short as a few minutes, between relative strangers. You will also note the emphasis here on performance improvement and learning that is driven by specific often task-based learning opportunities. Undoubtedly, good chemistry between the manager and the employee can promote coaching and also make the experience of coaching even more satisfying. However, if the manager makes it "psychologically safe" for the employee to openly talk about what he or she wants or needs to learn and can facilitate the development of trust, that is often enough to make coaching possible.

**Figure 1.1**    Coaching and Mentoring Compared

|  | Mentor | Coach |
|---|---|---|
| Purpose | Personal and professional development | Developing the capabilities of performers with potential, often task oriented |
| Focus | On both immediate and long-term development issues | Increasing the coachee's professional competencies |
| Role | Leader at any level above the mentee within the organization | Coach who may be the coachee's manager or other individuals (peers, staff professionals) |
| Methods | Holistic discussions that support career development and growth | Professional facilitation of learning transitions, sounding board, heading off derailment |
| Outcomes | Objective and career success | Performance improvement and learning |
| Duration | Long term | Flexible and can be short term |

*Source:* Adapted from Murphy and Kram (2015, p. 114).

## The Title of the Book Is *The Coaching Manager*

It is absolutely true as we have seen that developmental coaching can take place in any kind of relationship. It is a core activity of good parent for instance. (We both found that we became slightly better parents after figuring some of this out! Teenagers do appreciate being *asked* before being accused.) So what is unique about being a "coaching manager"? We believe that there are several aspects to this question. It began with an observation we heard repeatedly early in our studies of coaching managers to the effect that "I sometimes wonder if I learn more from our coaching discussions than they do . . . " There is a unique but very important win-win when one combines coaching and managing.

Managers have a number of key roles to play in helping an organization's effectiveness. They make decisions, create budgets, communicate strategy, set business goals and plans, troubleshoot, talk with key customers, and engage in a variety of other activities familiar to most readers. We would submit that it is possible that by holding coaching discussions and learning about the issues employees are addressing and the opportunities they see for growth, a manager will be far more able to perform nearly all of these roles more effectively. They will have access to better information, a better understanding of who can do what, a better understanding of the motivational issues faced by individuals and teams, and more able to spot trouble sooner, among other things. So far, the logic is quite strong. But is there also a conflict between these two roles.

The coaching manager is also the boss. She must on occasion use more coercive leadership techniques in the interest of time or to deal with poor performance. Some of her decisions may be quite unpopular. She may have to lay people off, for instance. Ultimately, the question comes for us, can she be trusted in spite of the fact that at times she may indeed make employees angry? We have been told repeatedly, no, there is no conflict here. In fact, by being known as a manager who tries to help people do their jobs better, they feel that they are seen as being fair. When they have to make the tough decisions, there is generally a sense that they have no rushed to judgment, but rather that the looked for alternatives before having to make those tough decisions.

Not to belabor the point, we were recently asked by the *Harvard Business Review* Blog to come up with a very concise statement in response to this question. Editors do force authors to come right to the point. Here was our response (Weintraub & Hunt, 2015). You will note that to re-enforce our previous comments about the distinction between coaching and mentoring, coaching is indeed quite instrumental. You

only take the time to coach in our view, if you really see it necessary. You take the time to coach if:

1. You see it as an essential tool for achieving business goals. This is about business, not about being nice, though most of the managers we have interviewed probably are rather nice to deal with. Perhaps a better way of saying it is that they are professional and see treating their colleagues with the respect and individual consideration to be both necessary and civil. This is probably the most important reason, but there are three others that we run into on a regular basis.

2. You want to help people develop. As one manager we interviewed recently told us, "isn't helping others to be more successful one of the key roles of a manager?" Coaching managers tend to believe that everyone, including themselves, needs to keep growing.

3. You are curious. Talking with your colleagues is a great way to find out what is going on, what opportunities are available, how your team can accomplish more, or be innovative. Coaching managers believe that really understanding the people and the business is terribly important. Coaching is a really good way to find out. We have been told repeatedly through the years that when coaching, you may well gain than give more knowledge.

4. You are interested in establishing connections. You know that to be an effective manager in any capacity, you have to understand your people's needs and styles. You have to try and see things as they see them, now how you wish they would see them.

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### Exercise 1.1    What Do You Think About Coaching?

Coaching is a very old form of human activity. It has been a fixture of athletics for centuries. You have almost certainly had occasion to interact with a coach. Take a minute and jot down some notes in response to the following self-assessment questions. As may not be the case in your studies of other subjects, you already know a great deal about coaching. You have probably worked with a coach. You have seen coaches on TV. You have read about them. You may have received coaching from managers or other individuals over the course of your career. These experiences will shape your approach to coaching. You will see how those models compare with the model presented in the remainder of this book.

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*Best Coaches:* Think about the best coaches you have known or have some familiarity with:

- What did they do that was most useful?
- What did they do that was not useful?
- In what ways have they influenced your thinking about what coaching really means?

*Worst Coaches:* Now ask yourself the same three questions about the worst coaches you've known.

- What did they do that was most useful?
- What did they do that was not useful?
- In what ways have they influenced your thinking about what coaching really means?

Finally, if you were honest with yourself about the influence these models have had on you and your beliefs about coaching:

- What beliefs do you bring to the task of coaching in business that you probably need to stick with?
- What beliefs do you bring to the task of coaching in business that you may need to change?

In evaluating your responses, consider the following question: Did the best coaches push for compliance, or did they push for growth and learning? In other words, did the best coaches do nothing more than make sure you did your job? Alternatively, did the best coaches make sure that you learned something while you were doing your job? We suspect that most of you, when thinking about good versus not-so-good coaches, will see the difference.

To clarify this point further, we'll speak more directly to the kinds of learning outcomes you might think about while considering what you learned along the way. D. Tim Hall (1986) has proposed four different kinds of learning outcomes to consider when assessing one's development. Two of those outcomes are short-term: We may learn to perform our current jobs more effectively, or we may feel differently about our current jobs. These are valuable goals directly relevant to coaching, but there is more. A manager who insists on compliance or only offers feedback may well see at least temporary improvements in performance.

Two of the outcomes are more long-term in nature. We come to see ourselves differently (our identities evolve), and we become more adaptable

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

and more able to deal with change. Just a bit of prodding can usually help individuals learn to perform their work more effectively, which will make them feel better about what they are doing. We would guess that the learning outcomes you experienced from coaches you found particularly effective left you feeling even more strongly about the experience. Perhaps you felt more confident or had a clearer sense of your strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes. We would also guess that you left the experience feeling more capable of dealing with the world and interested in taking on new challenges. It is our hope that the model of developmental coaching we present in overview form in the next chapter will give you the tools that can help create both the short-term and the long-term gains just described. We predict, based on what we've learned from the managers we've worked with, that you will accrue some of the same results yourself.

P.S. These are the examples of the kinds of questions coaching managers sometimes ask when trying to promote a coaching dialogue. In the next chapter, we'll provide a more thorough overview of the Coaching Manager Model.