

BLOG

What Are You Coaching For?

Coaching should be seen as working with a team member to develop their skills and abilities to ensure that they are not only in the right place and role but that they have the knowledge, training, and ability to do the job.

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Coaching can be a really broad concept. So broad that it can seem useless without some kind of focus or target and eventual goal. Even in its simplest form, coaching is an extremely important tool to help guide team members in the right direction. As a leader, it is easy to see the value of coaching, how it can benefit the organization, how it can help to drive engagement, and even reduce churn.

Unfortunately, coaching is a management skill that is definitely easier said than done!

Coaching is not just about telling a team member what they have done wrong, or even solving a problem that they were struggling to solve on their own — this narrow definition only perpetuates the problem.

Rather, coaching should be seen as working with a team member to develop their skills and abilities to ensure that they are not only in the right place and role but that they have the knowledge, training, and ability to do the job.

Coaching 101

When you coach someone, you need to know what you are trying to achieve. A good tool to help you with this is to create a quick 2X2 matrix. The vertical axis represents “doing the right things” and the horizontal axis represents “getting the right results.”

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS	COACH TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE	COACH TO ENHANCE
DOING THE WRONG THINGS	COACH TO CORRECT BEHAVIOURS	COACH TO CHANGE PERCEPTION
	GETTING THE WRONG RESULTS	GETTING THE RIGHT RESULTS

Quadrant Summaries

1. Right Behaviors and Right Results

This is an example of the One Minute Manager when you are looking for them to “do something right.” It is easy to diagnose, but shouldn’t be overlooked as an area of focus. Maintaining attention on this area will ensure that your teams focus their efforts on the areas that are successful and build on these successes to reach even greater heights.

Results of Coaching The common misconception is that coaching is only for the “problem children” on the team. In reality, this couldn’t be further from the truth. **Coaching helps high potential team members get even better.**

By focusing your coaching on the competent people within your team, you:

- Build a stronger team
- Attract talent from other internal teams
- Build a network within your organization that not only believes in your mandate but can help you continue to grow in your own career

By building a stronger team through coaching, you are better able to motivate your team and fend off dissatisfaction and disengagement.

2. Wrong Behaviors and Wrong Results

Similarly, this is equally easy to diagnose. Coaching here should focus on the specific issues and equally specific actions required to address those issues and correct the behavior.

Corrective Actions You can employ some fundamental coaching principles to help underperforming team members:

- Explain clearly and concisely the issue that is at fault and why their behavior, actions, and performance need to change. Put it in terms that are easy to understand but also convey the larger impact to the team and company as a whole. Include personal rewards that can accrue from success — internal growth, recognition, credibility, and financial rewards are just a few angles that can be used to incentivize the needed behaviour.
- Ensure that they acknowledge their behaviour and the suggested corrective action. Getting this buy-in ensures that the team member understands the issue and can be a reference point later on, if the behaviour is not corrected.
- Plan the appropriate steps jointly to ensure that both parties understand what is involved in correcting the situation. Focus on SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, Timely) to ensure that there is no uncertainty and revisit these goals at a timely follow-up meeting.
- Reinforce the positive — remember that the best motivator is not fear, but recognition and positive reinforcement for a job well done. Recognize when the team member is making an effort and continue rewarding those behaviors.

The Wrong Fit It's possible that during the course of your coaching sessions, you come to the conclusion that the team member is not suited to their current role. This could be a function of temperament, knowledge, attitude, or simply ability.

Coaches have two options in these situations — letting the team member go, or (if possible) using this as an opportunity to redefine the role to best serve both the team member and the organization. The individual can also be moved to a different role within the organization or change their reporting relationship so that parts of the role that do not fit are moved to a more suitable individual.

3. Wrong Behaviors and Right Results

Situations that fall within this quadrant can be difficult because the individual can get complacent or develop an unrealistic expectation of outcomes. In these cases, it's important to ask: Is the person willing to make a change? When individuals fall into this category it is very difficult to coach them because, despite their attitude or performance, they are still successful.

To address these cases, focus on the impact that the behavior is having on other parts of the business. What is the perception are other team members and the organization as a whole getting? Use 360-

degree feedback to get a full picture. Show how other members of the team perform differently and how that behaviour leads to success without the friction caused by the current, undesired, behaviour.

Coaching here is not just about improving a specific issue, the focus really is on developing a perceptions and acceptance that an issue even exists.

4. Right Behaviors and Wrong Results

Coaching here is about supporting, comforting, encouraging, and working together to make sure that the behaviors really are the right ones — and working on helping them refocus and stay motivated.

Emphasis should be placed on promoting the positives. While it's still important to review and learn from failures, the focus should not be on finding fault, but rather emphasizing future successes.

By assigning the person you're coaching in the appropriate spot on the grid, you'll be better able to discuss the details with them in your regularly scheduled one-on-ones.

How often do I need to coach?

At all fast-growing companies, goals and priorities can change quickly and the only way for team members to know what the new targets are is to communicate often and openly with the team and redirect their efforts appropriately.

If coaching is only conducted on an annual or semi-annual basis, you are missing a great opportunity to not only improve your team and its performance but also reap the benefits for yourself, as a leader.

"Coaching is not a technique. It's not something to be switched on. It's the cornerstone of teamwork. It can help to tackle conflict constructively, it can help us all to learn, develop, grow and improve."¹

Professor Randall S Peterson, London Business School

Two approaches for you to try out in your own team:

Calendar Driven Coaching

Frequent and regular coaching ensures that your team is continuously informed about the criteria and requirements for success. But, these sessions need to be more than just a quick and informal chat.

- They should have a clearly defined structure and be led by the team member's direct supervisor.
- The focus should not be on any one specific incident, but rather the person's overall performance from the previous coaching session with a focus on the successes, problems, and lessons learned.

- Coaching sessions should be an open discussion of issues and concerns and the team member should feel that they are free to speak their mind and provide feedback.

Scheduled coaching can happen at any time of the year, but it's best to set them in a regular pattern. At Sensei Labs, we hold bi-weekly one-on-ones that are pre-scheduled to make sure we always find the time to meet. When conflicts come up, and one-on-ones need to be moved, they are rescheduled for the next available time. Viewing these meetings as vital prevents them from being skipped or forgotten and ensures continuity in coaching.

Event Driven Coaching

If a specific issue occurs, it is better to deal with it immediately instead of waiting for a regularly scheduled session. Team members will have a greater opportunity to improve if they are able to call upon details from the specific situation and this type of coaching is conducted as a more informal review. Positive feedback also can be reinforced in these sessions.

- They should occur whenever the situation warrants and should be specific.
- They should be viewed as an opportunity to coach and educate, and not only to address problem areas when issues arise. Event-driven coaching can be significantly more informal and can be initiated by the team member or leader as the situation warrants. Opportunities for this type of coaching can be as simple as a quick check-in at the water cooler. However, questions asked should be open-ended and should allow the team member to address the feedback and create an open discussion that can delve into more detail.

Final thoughts

As you continue to coach, guide, and nurture your team, you will be better able to motivate them, improve retention and build on individual performance. After all, people don't quit companies — they quit managers.

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