

Chapter 1: The What and the Why of Managerial Coaching

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT

The premise behind this book is relatively simple. It is that with careful planning and some serious effort it is possible for work professionals to substantially reduce the time that it would otherwise take for them to develop professionally in their careers. The accompanying participant's guide, *Jump-start: How to Accelerate Your Development as a Leader*, was created to provide professionals with a comprehensive, systematic development framework for becoming stronger performers and more effectively reaching their career goals. This guide supports that text by providing you, the career planner's manager, with several guidelines and tools that you can use to foster the development of your team members.

Before going further let's make certain that you have picked up the right book. You see, whenever a manager performs coaching it is usually with the intention of achieving one of three things. Performance coaching, otherwise known as remedial coaching, is directed towards those professionals who need to turn around their performance in some critical area. Often such coaching has to address not only technical skill deficiencies, but also serious problem areas related to leadership style or communication issues. Transitional coaching is very different in that it is concerned with helping employees who are new to an organization make a successful adjustment to a new work culture, a different set of work norms, and/or a very different set performance expectations. In this book I will be focusing on a third form of coaching known as developmental coaching. This area of coaching application is specifically designed to help good performers fully develop and grow on the job, and to be better prepared to take on broader and more demanding organizational responsibilities.

The preface to Jumpstart details my argument for making the claim that professional and leadership development can be greatly accelerated. For now let me simply say that one of the reasons why I make this claim is that the professional development is one leadership area that holds the potential for significant improvement. The reason is that development planning, as it is typically practiced today, is seldom treated with the discipline and rigor that one would expect from any other business process. That is, quite typically individuals don't approach their professional development in a systematic and detailed way; one that includes a targeted set of goals, a written plan, a clear assessment of priorities, and measures for assessing progress. In this book, I will introduce you to a disciplined and effective developmental coaching approach that can help you extract the greatest benefit from your coaching efforts as a manager. In adopting this approach you will find that the professionals whom you are coaching will be able to make faster progress on their development goals.

Why You Should Make Development a Top Priority

At this point you may be having a few doubts about how much time and effort you can afford to devote to the area of leadership development. From my perspective there are several pragmatic reasons that you may want to assign this area a top priority:

Reason One: Your time is too precious to waste. Yet your time is wasted if your team members fail to carefully think through their development priorities. The result of this kind of sloppy thinking shows up when direct reports inundate you with requests for a variety of training courses, when only a few of these courses help move them down the 'critical path' of their development goals. Another symptom of sloppy development planning is when employees attempt to tackle work projects or assignments that have little payoff to either themselves or your organization.

Your time is also wasted if a year from now you are managing a group of people who have exactly the same skill sets and expertise that they have now. If you are typical of managers who have

survived during the past few lean years, I am sure that you are operating with a very lean staff structure. To make do, you may be requiring people to take on work responsibilities that they haven't previously managed, or to stretch their efforts over a much wider range of work responsibilities. You simply can't do this effectively unless your people are able to step up to the plate and find ways to accelerate their on-the-job learning.

Reason Two: Your people are a reflection of your leadership ability. As someone who has conducted leadership talent reviews for over twenty years I find that when senior executives attempt to evaluate the leadership potential of a manager, one of the most common questions that they ask is, "Is this someone who knows how to grow talent?" In attempting to answer that your senior executives will take a look at how much the members of your team have grown during the past year under your coaching and direction. It says a lot for a manager when the people who report to them are asked to support key work projects, or are able demonstrate that over time they are becoming more knowledgeable and competent on a wide range of work functions. In addition, your ability to advance is directly dependent on your ability to groom exceptional successors for your own role. Finally, consider the fact that the talent management judgment calls that you make as a leader – such as determining who to recommend for a limited-seating executive development workshop, or who to assign to a cross-functional team—say a lot about your ability to assess talent. In other words, in order to make good talent management decisions you need to be able to understand, and be able to speak knowledgeably about, the development needs and leadership potential of your people.

Reason Three: It pays to use the white space. The traditional apprenticeship model of leadership development places almost all of the responsibility for development on you, the individual manager. The truth is that today much of the most important opportunities for professional development actually occur within your organization's white space; the term used to describe those functional areas and projects that span organizational silos. I am talking here about such avenues as cross-functional project

teams, having people temporarily loaned out to other work teams, encouraging them to assist second-level managers on selected initiatives, or making use of social networking tools such as online forums. The point is that professional development takes a lot longer and less effective, if we limit our concept of development to those opportunities that exist within our immediate work teams. In addition, we overlook excellent opportunities for matching professionals' development needs to organization-wide business challenges. Without your direction and guidance, the members of your work team are more likely to miss out on these opportunities because they lack your knowledge of organizational white-space opportunities.

Reason Four: Most organizations can no longer afford to live with wasteful and protracted professional development cycles. When it comes to succession planning, many companies find it difficult to identify two or three exceptional successor candidates who are 'ready now' to move into key roles. By exceptional candidates I am not talking here about people who, in a pinch, could serve as so-so replacement candidates. Instead, I am talking about identifying professionals who, should a promotional opportunity arise, you feel confident could successfully compete against the best external candidates that could be obtained from a major search firm.

If you are not sure whether this is an issue for your own department put it to a test. Take out a red pen and mark all mission-critical positions within your department's succession plan. These are positions that, were an incumbent to suddenly leave, would create a serious problem for your organization. Now make a guess at what your estimated time-to-fill would be if you were forced to go out on the street and locate, screen, hire and train top-notch replacements. I am willing to bet that in many cases you would have to wait about nine to twelve months for those positions to be filled. When you add to these risks the increasingly rapid churn in leadership positions that frequently accompanies organizational restructurings, then the problem gets stickier. The bottom line is that we are living in a period in which agile companies have the advantage, and this means having access to a broader number

of talented individuals who can be quickly deployed on key projects and accountabilities. Accelerated development is the key to increasing organizational agility.

Reason Five: The sink-or-swim approach to development results in unwanted risk. It is not uncommon for a manager to try to plug a hole in a key function by throwing in the best (not-yet-ready-for-primetime) promotional candidate and, in the process, placing that person in a sink-or-swim role. A more reasonable plan of action is to begin to test people against responsibilities that are somewhat beyond their current skill and experience level, well before we are forced to place a big bet on their leadership potential. In other words, accelerated development does not just mean getting people through the pipeline faster. It also means helping people to be better prepared to deal with any new development opportunities that may come their way. Using development opportunities to test an individual's leadership capacity and business savvy also helps your organization perform a more accurate assessment on that person's readiness for advancement.

Reason Six: You're Best People Won't Wait. The last, and possibly most important reason for investing in the development of your team members, is that doing so provides you with the most effective tool for retaining them, and encouraging them to give their best performance. The old apprentice model, with its slow and protracted approach to development, tends to be very attractive to mediocre performers. It offers them a safe, gradual learning curve that doesn't push them out of their comfort zones. At the same time, your best people are the ones that are likely to become impatient with this same slow-growth approach to professional development. The result is that they may begin to look around to other areas within, or outside of, your company that can provide greater challenge and fulfillment. For these same reasons it is difficult to attract top-notch people into a work function, if that work function has developed the reputation of being the organizational 'elephant graveyard' where people go to plateau, stagnate and die.

Together, these six reasons suggest that it is to your best interest, and the benefit of your company, to make a solid investment in developmental coaching. Having said that let me assure you that I believe that it is possible for you to encourage the development of your team members without feeling that to do so you have to take over the responsibility for managing their careers. I believe that you will find that within this leader's guide you will be introduced to a managerial coaching model that provides a good balance between management support and professional accountability.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE AS A COACH

Some Common Misconceptions About Coaching

Having talked about the importance of coaching I would now like to shift gears and talk about what it takes to succeed as a coach. Perhaps the best way to start off on this subject is to take a careful look at five of the more common misconceptions that people have regarding the coaching process:

Misconception #1: Coaching is therapy. To perform as a therapist an individual needs to possess very specialized skills, applied training, and appropriate academic credentials in the areas of clinical or counseling psychology. A therapist takes on a completely non-directive role when helping clients address important emotional or adjustment issues. Another characteristic of therapy is that therapeutic conversations tend to intrude into a variety of areas across a client's entire life, including family and marital issues, and clients feel safe in disclosing very intimate details of their lives to their therapists. Finally, the goal of therapy is to help individuals make substantial changes in the way that they feel about themselves and their lives.

In point of fact, no one expects you to have the background to address problems of drug or alcohol abuse, marital discord, or personal anxiety. If you encounter these types of issues in any

management conversation with an employee you need to refer the employee to your company's employee assistance program (EAP) for counseling by a qualified third-party. As a managerial coach, the balancing act that you strive for is to respect your team member's work/life priorities, while at the same time having a strong say in insuring that a team member's development plan is directed tied to the performance goals of your company. The scope for managerial coaching is the workplace; discussions that extend into a direct report's personal and family life are typically considered unwelcome and intrusive. In short, as a managerial coach the focus for your discussion are those skills, knowledge areas, and professional behaviors that are likely to either support or impede an individual's career success within your organization.

Misconception #2: Coaching is the same time as performance management. Throughout the year I am sure that you set performance goals and expectations, establish success measures and metrics, and provide employees with feedback and performance coaching. Once a year all of this is capped off with the formal feedback and evaluation process that you provide as part of your company's annual performance review. It is important to understand however, that the focus for performance management is an evaluation of current and past business results, and in identifying short-term actions that can help get sub-standard performance back on line. It's true that during the last few minutes of a performance review you get into discussions about setting 'improvement goals'. The problem is that these discussions tend to be very cursory and task-oriented, and are largely overshadowed by the employee's concerns regarding performance ratings and compensation.

Throughout this book when I use the term 'developmental coaching', I am talking about a very different kind of manager-employee discussion. First of all, a developmental coaching discussion is, by definition, future-focused. It is intended, not to help mediocre performers correct performance issues, but help good job performers prepare to take on broader leadership roles within your company.

Preparation for next-level assignments often requires individuals to develop and acquire very different kinds of skills and abilities than they currently have in their professional arsenals. As a result, a person's past performance may not always provide a definitive indicator of future leadership potential, or a clear guide for how the professional can best prepare for broader leadership roles.

Misconception #3: Good coaches should have all of the answers. Managers are sometimes reluctant to take on coaching roles because they are concerned that when it comes to advising their direct reports on questions such as what it takes to advance up a certain leadership ladder, they won't have all of the answers. The truth is that coaching is not about having the right answers; it is about asking the kinds of insightful questions that can encourage a person to reflect more carefully on their careers plans, and undertake a more in-depth review of their development needs.

Misconception #4: Coaching involves taking responsibility for another person's career success. If coaching is performed correctly, there should be no doubt in the mind of your team members that they have the lion's share of responsibility for their own professional development. No one expects you to be a crystal ball gazer and predict a team member's chances of advancing within your organization, or lay out a detailed blueprint that to insure that person's career success. The content and the format of the Participant's Guide reinforces the concept of self-accountability, by directing career planners to focus their efforts on those development actions that are directly within their control. The coach's role is to help career planners think more clearly about their career goals and plans, and to provide information and assistance that can assist them in implementing these plans.

Misconception 5: Coaching raises false expectations on the part of employees. I have heard this one many times before. It usually comes across in a statement such as, "We have limited promotional opportunities here. If I ask my people about their development and career goals, aren't I simply raising expectations that I can't possibly meet?" While this is a valid concern and is certainly understandable, stop and think about it for a moment. First, for a lot of people 'developing on the job' simply means

knowing how to make a bigger contribution to their organization, while gaining recognition for the effort they are making to grow as professionals. It can involve something as simple as getting one of your performers selected for a cross-functional project, helping them develop new technical skills, or giving them more visibility to your senior managers. In addition, you may discover that there may be ways to formally expand the scope of a team member's current job, either by broadening that person's existing roles or by talking to your Human Resources manager about the option of revising their formal job description. Finally, if few advancement positions are available in your organization, I would argue that this is even more of a reason why you should push professional development. Without your support the members of your work group will find themselves at a serious disadvantage when competing for those limited positions. Should your direct reports decide to apply for promotional positions you don't want them to feel that they are unable to compete because they haven't received the right training, development support, or career assistance.

What Good Managerial Coaches Do

If coaching isn't therapy, performance management, or employee caretaking then what is it, you may ask? The answer is that coaches help employees think more carefully and critically about their development and career choices, while leaving it up to those employees to be accountable for both making and acting on those choices. As a coach, there are nine steps you can take to accomplish this. As you read through the following list, take a second to check off those areas where it might be helpful for you, as a coach, to invest greater time and attention:

[Note to editor: In front of each of the following list of 9 statements provide a box for checking]

1. First, you can give your people needed encouragement by urging them to move out of their comfort zones and experiment with new work challenges, by recognizing their unique skill sets and strengths, and by helping them identify those incremental actions they can take to close skill gaps.
2. The second thing you can do as a coach is to encourage career planners to engage in critical self-reflection. This means helping them take a candid look, not only at how they perform within different work situations, but also how they professionally present themselves to key stakeholders in those situations. It also means using probing, open-ended questions to help career planners turn 'fuzzy' thinking into ideas that are clearly delineated. In the next chapter I will provide a few examples of some of the questions that you can use to encourage team members to perform a deeper, more substantive self-critique of their career goals and development needs.
3. Coaches also help develop people by encouraging big-picture thinking. Compared to your direct reports you probably have a broader, more complete idea of what it takes for people to advance in your organization. Similarly you can provide valuable coaching assistance by providing career planners with realistic previews of what it takes to succeed in next-level assignments, or the different work conditions and performance expectations that characterize different departments or work locations. Finally, you probably are able to look further out on the horizon to detect the onset of large organizational changes, such as new product launches or reorganizations, that could directly affect the success of their development plans.
4. Other developmental coaching roles that managers take on are those of impartial sounding board and devil's advocate. A person who uses a 'shotgun approach' to career planning (blasting blindly against the target in the hope that something hits) is likely to find himself attempting to take on too many development activities. Simply taking the time to listen and ask reasonable questions, a coach encourages individuals to more critically explore their career decisions. A coach can also help

professionals understand the tradeoffs (in time, money, and personal investment) that need to be taken into consideration when choosing among different development options.

5. Good coaches also help their people by encouraging them to think carefully about the long-term consequences of different development actions. An individual may, for example, consider turning down a promotional offer because she feels that the offer doesn't come with a large enough compensation increase. At the same time, what this individual may not realize is that your executives view that position as a necessary stepping-stone to long-term advancement within her chosen career path.

6. A manager also fulfills an important coaching role in providing employees with feedback on their skills and development needs. What is equally important, they help career planners make sense of, and consolidate, this feedback with that they receive from other managers, co-workers, internal customers, and through formal channels such as 360o surveys.

7. Coaches also support career planning by requiring their direct reports to treat their development and career plans with the same professional consideration that they would any other aspect of business planning. This means getting plans in writing, translating 'fuzzy' intentions into concrete, time-limited actions, establishing metrics for periodically assessing their own progress on their plans, and giving their best when presented with development opportunities.

8. Managerial coaches know that they can't possibly be all things to all people. For this reason they also take the time to direct their people towards other resources that can help, including the company's leadership development department, outside professional and trade organizations, or other managers who might be willing to provide useful information and guidance.

9. Finally, managers fulfill an important coaching role whenever they model continual development for their team members. You do this whenever you open up to your people and share your own development goals, show them that you are willing to take on new work challenges, or invite their feedback regarding any actions they feel that you could take to become a stronger leader.