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## Coaching: A Philosophy, Concept, Tool and Skill

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*Nowadays you will come across the word 'coaching' anytime and anywhere in the world. It is used in education, but also in business. It is used in big organizations, but also in small ones. It is used in non-profit organizations, but also in profit ones. It is used on an executive level, but also on the work floor. You come across various types of coaching, like personal coaching, buddy coaching, peer coaching, executive coaching, board coaching, business coaching, performance coaching, etc.*

*But what exactly is coaching? Is it a philosophy, a concept, a tool or a skill? When is it useful, and when not. And how can coaching be applied in everyday life? In this article I will give a short summary of important elements of coaching.*

**Keywords:** *coaching, tool and skill, organizations*

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## History of Coaching

The concept of coaching has been around for as long as the human race itself. Right from the earliest days the older or more skilled taught the young how to hunt, cook, paint pictures on cave walls and just how to be useful and effective members of their tribes or communities in general.

This type of practical, skill-related coaching still exists in most societies to this day. However, a more sophisticated form of coaching, aimed at inspiring greater understanding or awareness can be seen emerging in the earliest philosophies and religions, ranging from the lessons incorporated in Aesop's Fables to the lessons incorporated in the Parables.

Throughout history and literature there are examples of coaching in action but surprisingly the practice (at least in terms of executive development) appeared to fall into disuse in the late twentieth century. These were the days of the full-blooded management training program. Remember when most management development programs lasted at least five days? The major management training colleges advertised general 'open programs' to which managers and executives from all walks of life and business would come to be put through a pre-set and unalterable program irrespective of their individual needs. Some programs were often considerably longer and the five to eight week 'total executive development experience' was not uncommon.

This approach to development was not without its merits. It brings about immediate benefits to those being trained. But there are problems inherent in this approach and they are both economic as well as more subjective in nature.

The economic issue became apparent with the downturn of the economy in the 1990s when the organizations that had hitherto supported lengthy 'open programs' found that they could no longer afford to go down this costly route and started to demand more tailor made solutions from training providers. This initially took the form of requiring customized programs that were aimed at addressing specific organizational issues as opposed to the more general 'sheep dipping' approach.

At the same time both organizations as well as their managers started to see the benefits of a more individualized approach to personal

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development. This is mirrored in society where we have gone from a situation based on the collective where the emphasis was on community and the nation, to one focused on the individual where we all have to manage our own careers and lives.

While generic skills could be taught, there were a host of issues ranging from complex to highly personal or confidential matters that demanded something different to training. People needed something that enabled issues to be discussed in depth and solutions arrived at by debate, reflection and discovery over a period of time. This was in stark contrast to the pre-packaged solutions so typical of most training programs.

But coaching still took time to catch on. As the idea of coaching developed, organizations started employing psychologists to understand employee motivation and development needs, as well as for recruitment, selection and assessment. Sport also had a strong influence on the rise of coaching. Tim Gallwey's book "The Inner Game of Tennis" in 1974 related to a more psychological approach to peak performance. He stated that the opponent in one's head was greater than the one on the other side of the net.

In 1992, Sir John Whitmore, a motor racing champion, published "Coaching for Performance" where he developed the most influential model of coaching - the GROW model (goal, reality, options, will). Gurus such as Stephen Covey and Antony Robbins also fuelled the appetite for personal development and awareness.

In the 1990's the US went into recession and corporate downsizing became the rage. One of the downsizing interventions was to reduce the number of management layers within organizations. It may have seemed good in theory, but as the world around was turning in an accelerating speed, it left managers and leaders in highly stressed environments.

This development spread around the world and gave a boost to the upsurge of coaching. With fewer managers in a more complicated and faster evolving world the old Harvard principle of 'span of control' became obsolete. If the focus was only on span of control, you would surely be late in anticipating on decisive developments in the world, its societies and markets. The need for a paradigm shift from 'span of control' to 'span of support' became evident. If there are less managers available and they have

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to perform their role in a more complicated and faster evolving world, then the employees need to be empowered to develop higher levels of self-conduct. A process in which they need to be supported more than to be controlled.

The industry also changed from one where coaches were brought in as often for poor performers as for high performers (often dealing with performance issues where the manager did not want to hassle or conflict) to today, where the vast majority of coaching is aimed at high level performers rather than remedial cases. Coaching today is for the high performer, top talent and those leading an organization.

Many large private, public and voluntary sector organizations (as well as small and medium sized businesses) use executive coaching as a stand-alone development solution or dovetail coaching with other organizational development programs.

## **Role of the Coach**

Executive, business or performance coaching can be simply described as helping someone to learn in order to improve their performance. It is usually, but not only, a one-to-one activity and is not about issuing instructions but is about helping, showing, giving feedback, explaining and encouraging.

Coaching recognizes that most development takes place on the job and that often real learning requires a demanding task or problem to be tackled. The process requires regular and effective contact between coach and client and recognition that all sorts of occasions - ranging from a change in the 'coachee's' job to gearing up for a specific project - may require this sort of intervention.

Coaching recognizes that the coach already has the vast majority of answers/facts and the coach's role is to stimulate that knowledge/learning and allow the coaches to unlock and achieve their true potential. As a coach, leader or manager it can be as simple as asking your colleague one single question so they can engage their brain and learn. One question is all it takes for the coach to be inspirational.

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## Six Roles of an Executive Coach

At the International Coach Federation European Conference in Italy in 2003, Robert Dilts ran a seminal session titled 'From Coach to Awakener'. He stated that coaching is the process of helping another person perform at the peak of his or her abilities. It doesn't presuppose that people are broken - on the contrary, it helps them identify and develop their strengths. It starts from the assumption that people have the answers and that the coach's role is to help that person to overcome internal resistances and interferences, give feedback on behavior and give tips and guidance.

But Dilts added that a coach plays five further roles:

### Guiding and Caretaking

Guiding is the process of directing another person along the path leading from where they are presently to where they want to be, providing a safe and supportive environment without unnecessary distractions or interferences from the outside.

### Teaching

Teaching relates to helping a person develop cognitive skills and capabilities and the emphasis is on learning. It focuses on the acquisition of general skills, rather than on performance in specific situations. A teacher helps a person to develop new strategies for thinking and acting.

### Mentoring

A teacher instructs, while a coach provides specific behavioral feedback, in order to help a person learn or grow. Mentors, on the other hand, guide us to discover our own unconscious competences, and strengthen beliefs and values, often through their own example.

### Sponsorship

Sponsorship involves creating a context in which others can act, grow and excel. Sponsorship is about the development of identity and core values, awakening and safeguarding potential within others. It involves the

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commitment to the promotion of something that is already within a person or group, but which is not being manifested to its fullest capacity.

### Awakening

Awakening goes beyond coaching, teaching, mentoring and sponsorship to include the level of vision, mission and spirit. An awakener puts other people in touch with their own missions and visions and thus the coach needs to know his/her own vision and mission and purpose.

## **Core Coaching Competences**

Knowledge: As a coach you need to know...

- What the coaching process involves
- What models of coaching can underpin your role as a coach
- What personal and professional capabilities the coachee needs to develop
- How to manage the coaching relationship
- How to set boundaries
- How people learn and how to adapt to different learning styles

Skills: As a coach you need to be able to...

- Listen
- Communicate at different levels
- Ask searching questions
- Influence with integrity
- Give feedback without causing offence
- Be empathetic
- Demonstrate confidence in oneself and also the coachee
- Facilitate goal setting
- Be challenging
- Be compassionate
- Always act with integrity and in the best interests of the coachee

Behaviors: As a coach you should...

- Encourage self-discovery

- Act as a role model
- Be non-judgmental
- Use humor appropriately
- Illustrate that you value diversity
- Show tact and diplomacy
- Always maintain confidentiality
- Seek to build client's confidence and self esteem
- Show other sources of support to client
- Critically evaluate one's own effectiveness

## **GROW-model for Coaching**

The GROW model, originally conceived by Graham Alexander and brought to the fore by Sir John Whitmore, is possibly the best known model for coaching. Whitmore, made his name in the field of high performance coaching in the sporting arena but the technique is flexible enough to be applied virtually anywhere. Like most models it provides a structure for the coaching conversation that is designed to ensure some form of outcome.

### Goals

At this stage the process focuses on the goals that the coachee wishes to achieve, not only from the specific coaching session, but also in the longer term.

### Reality

This is a time for exploring the real nature of the problem, ensuring that the session is not sidetracked by false assumptions and for gathering information that will shed realistic light on the issue. It is not a time for problem solving.

### Options

This stage of the process is to explore the possible options of behavior or decision that will lead to the right solution.

### Wrap Up or Will

At this stage the focus moves onto what the coachee is going to do in terms of specific steps to reach the goal. It is also a stage of examining the potential obstacles that may arise and of discussing ways of overcoming them and of agreeing the resources needed and the nature of further support.

## **Approach of a Coaching Project**

In a coaching project the following steps are usually taken:

### Making acquaintance interview

This step is only taken if the coachee and coach don't know each other yet. During this step the coachee and coach ask each other job- and issue related questions, and sometimes even personal questions. In a coachee-coach-relationship it is important that the coachee feels a 'click' with the coach, and trusts and respects him/her. Sometimes a first impression doesn't feel good, and that is not a very promising start for a coaching project.

### Intake interview

During this step the coachee and the coach agree on the long term and short term goals the coachee wishes to achieve with the coaching project. The goals are stipulated as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Realistic and Time-bound) as possible. With 'specific' we mean context-specific and sensory-specific, specifying in which contexts the coachee wishes to achieve the goals, and how this achievement can be demonstrated in behavior and observed by the senses.

With 'measurable' we either mean measurable in figures or in demonstrable and observable behavior. With 'acceptable' we mean ethically acceptable to the coachee and his/her environment. With 'realistic' we mean that the goals can be achieved based on realistic potential and challenge. And with 'time-bound' we mean the timeframe within which the goals will be achieved. Finally the number, duration and frequency of the coach sessions are determined.



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### Personal Portfolio

With this step the coachee enters the above mentioned goals into his/her personal portfolio. This portfolio helps the coachee to guide and monitor his/her own coaching process. In most cases the following documents are inserted into the portfolio: goals, learning's, actions, results, and final conclusions. With 'learning's' we mean all relevant things the coachee learns during the coach process. With 'actions' we mean those learnings which the coachee really intends to apply and how he/she wishes to apply them. With 'results' we mean the effects the coachee experiences when applying the learning's. And with 'final conclusions' the coachee evaluates his/her own learning process.

### Coach Sessions

These are the sessions in which the actual coaching takes place. The keywords during these coach sessions are 'creating awareness' and 'taking responsibility'. The coach tries to discover the real issue, problem or challenge of the coachee. He also tries to increase the level of awareness of the coachee regarding all influencing elements and all elements to be influenced, including the awareness of any potential of the coachee to tackle the issue, problem or challenge. Knowledge is gathered, understanding is created and skill is practiced. The coach first creates an atmosphere in which the coachee feels comfortable in order to obtain the conscious and/or subconscious permission of the coachee to be confronted. Finally the coach stimulates the coachee to take responsibility and to apply what has been learned, discussed or agreed upon.

### Evaluation

During this session the coachee presents his personal portfolio to the coach as a demonstration of self-evaluation. The coach will give his comments on this self-evaluation and adds feedback and suggestions if necessary. Finally the options to further enhance transfer of learning after ending the coach project are discussed and agreed upon. Sometimes the coachee and coach decide for additional coach sessions, if certain element of the previous coach sessions needs more detailed attention.