

Why Companies Should Create a Coaching Culture

Bearing in mind the name of our company website, you'll understand why the headline, 'Don't create a coaching culture' grabbed my attention! It was in an article written by a top Canadian coach, Michael Bungay Stanier, entitled, 'Three Truths about Coaching'.

In it, he makes a very valid point that it would be a mistake to think that just because coaching is popular it is being done as well as it could be. He cites two reasons for coaching not having the impact it might in organisations:

The Challenge of Scale – often coaching is introduced to business leaders who are allocated an external coach to work with them on a one-to-one basis. Adopting such an approach throughout an organisation can prove overwhelmingly expensive and inconsistent if too many different coaches are employed with different coaching approaches. He recommends using external coaches sparingly and getting the organisation's leaders and managers to do the coaching themselves. This is something I would agree with.

Managers as Coaches – Despite being a good managerial skill to focus on, he comments that many managers and companies are finding it difficult to translate the skills learned in the classroom to the day-to-day working environment. This is true, but there are ways and means to address it.

He goes on to list 3 counter-intuitive truths about how to make coaching stick in your organisation. I'd like to add a few observations from my perspective and experience:

1. He says: Don't create a coaching culture.

Michael makes the point that coaching alone is not the panacea to cure all the problems in an organisation. Rather, it is a powerful tactic that is best used to support and achieve a specific business objective. There's a danger that the focus on a 'coaching culture' confuses the means for the end and fails to provide context.

From my perspective: The whole point of striving to create a coaching culture is to derive firstly a business benefit and, secondly, a personal benefit (which is still work-related) for those coaching and being coached. When we start working with companies in an advisory capacity, we ask you to consider and clarify exactly what you want a coaching style to deliver. An example would be 'To equip our managers with a leadership style that will help them manage their teams through the upheaval of change and restructuring so that measurable business objectives continue to be met or exceeded'. In our training programme this would be explicitly conveyed in the half-day introductory session so that line managers can immediately appreciate **why** their organisation is investing resources in creating a coaching culture and what this actually means.

2. He says: Keep it short, keep it simple.

For coaching to have any chance of sticking, it must fit to the reality of the managers' working life.

From my perspective: It's true that external coaches with their hour or couple of hours dedicated to a one-to-one coaching session do not provide the best role models for line managers as coaches. This is why, on our subsequent two-day programme, we work through the GROW Model initially and practise it in quite a 'formal' setting, then switch the emphasis to what we call '**coachable moments**'. Realistically, managers have much more opportunity (and are more willing) to spot brief opportunities for coaching throughout the day e.g. in response to a query, or when giving feedback etc. than they are to book a separate 30-minute 'coaching session'. We advocate building a coaching style into the tasks they have to fulfil as a job requirement such as appraisals, regular one-to-ones, team meetings etc.

There are countless opportunities for managers to use a coaching style and often they need help initially in raising their awareness of these. It is hugely satisfying on our Refresher workshops three months later, to hear about the many, varied instances when managers have used a coaching style with great success. And going back to the initial point, what I've realised over the years is that managers who are fortunate enough to have a number of one-to-one sessions with an effective external business coach, often emulate the style used with them for the benefit of their teams, and that's without any formal training at all in coaching skills.

3. He says: Strive for adequate.

For most people's challenges most of the time, being an adequate coach is more than enough.

From my perspective: I completely agree that coaches don't need to be 'perfect'. In Sir John Whitmore's foreword to Jonathan Passmore's book, 'Excellence in Coaching', he writes: "At a superficial level, coaching helps people to clarify their goals, to schedule their actions, and to succeed more readily at work and in life. It helps people to learn and perform better by enhancing their awareness, responsibility, self-confidence and self-reliance. At a deeper level, when undertaken well and responsibly, it helps people along their evolutionary journey towards higher or deeper levels of themselves – to discover who they really are". I tell managers they should be delighted if they manage to achieve his definition of the 'superficial' level. And if you 'mess up' the GROW Model, it really doesn't matter! Your coachee is unlikely to be an expert in the model and the relationship between you and them and constructive flow of the conversation is more important than sticking robotically to a structured model. It's there to help and, in my opinion, it's excellent, but no two coaching sessions are identically conducted.

Although many organisations' foray into coaching is via external coaches, which can bring about significant impact, those that take action to equip **all** their managers with coaching skills can achieve much more.

Invest in developing managers' coaching skills so that they can integrate this approach into how they do business day-to-day. A coaching culture is created when you 'tip the balance' of those using a coaching style versus those that don't. But above all, **know why** you want your managers to coach, and establish a clear

business context for this to happen. This is how you will bring about **real, measurable benefits** to the business, your employees, and your customers.

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