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# Why Managers Should Coach

**Darren Cockburn, an established Life and Business Coach, says although many managers do not use or understand coaching, it is one of the most powerful tools available.**

## WHY MANAGERS SHOULD COACH

Coaching is a highly effective management tool and yet, I have met only a small number of managers who adopt a coaching style when supporting their staff. The unfortunate truth is that many managers do not understand coaching and have received little or no formal training.

The benefits of coaching in a management context are significant:

- Coaching encourages members of staff to think for themselves, which is empowering. A spin-off benefit for the manager is that if the member of staff finds their own way with minimal advice they will not need to ask the same question next time, which will save time and increase performance. It is a great investment.
- Coaching enables diversity by allowing staff to achieve outcomes in their own ways, which is often more effective than a known route recommended by their manager.
- Coaching allows underlying competency issues to surface. For example, you may ask a member of staff questions and expect them to find solutions to a problem. If they fail to answer a reasonable question you have the option of asking yourself why. Do they need more experience or some personal development to enable them to find the answers?

I find that most managers who are effective coaches are often compromised when under pressure – when running late for meetings or up against deadlines, for example. In these situations, many managers will default to telling or advising rather than asking questions. They will use language like 'Do this.... do that' or 'Let me tell you how you should manage this issue.' Once the pressure lifts the managers may well fall back into a more constructive coaching style, knowing that in the long run using coaching rather than direct advice will benefit both themselves and the member of staff.

It is all a matter of balance and coaching can be counterproductive if over used. I have heard stories about people who are new to coaching and overly keen to practise on people making this mistake. If coaching is the only method used during conversations, it does start to become frustrating for the person being coached, which can be counterproductive. The good news is that the more you practise adopting a coaching style as a manager the easier it is to know when it is appropriate, how to integrate it into conversations and with whom. I consider myself to be a great coach but I find it a challenge not to default to 'tell' rather than 'ask' when I am under pressure.

Smart managers are conscious of their approach, ask for feedback and recognise that they will always be on a journey of learning when it comes to influencing people. Feedback is a gift and it helps managers learn how others feel about the way that they relate to them. Managers can ask their staff about the balance of questions compared to advice and get some insight into how they are doing.

Managers acting as coaches can also use their skills to work effectively with teams. I have attended project meetings where a team looked to me to provide some direction in the face of a major issue. In most cases, I did not have the answer. I would scratch my head, look confused for a few seconds and then remind myself about the power of coaching. I would then switch into group coaching mode and ask questions like:

- 'Does anybody have any ideas? There must be a way of working through this issue.'
- 'Does anybody know somebody who might have the answer?'
- 'What would have to be true in order for us to achieve this milestone date?'
- 'How can we work together to get the desired outcome?'

Questions like these are enormously

worthwhile because they encourage team members to think through problems.

Coaching should not be viewed as a panacea when it comes to management as it must always be used in conjunction with other techniques. It is a powerful tool that builds relationships, empowers people, encourages thinking (and that can't be a bad thing!) and ultimately helps the manager to achieve results. I would recommend coaching to any manager.

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***The unfortunate truth is that many managers do not understand coaching.***”

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Darren Cockburn is an established Life Coach and Business Coach and helps coaches build successful coaching practices specialising in client generation, sales and marketing for telephone/Skype coaching. He received an MBA with distinction from Nottingham University Business School and has a background in IT senior management. To discover more about the services offered through his organisation (My Life Coach) visit his website [www.my-life-coach.co.uk](http://www.my-life-coach.co.uk).

