

Core Coaching

Coaching for great
performance at work

Sheridan Maguire



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DIRECTORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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About the author

Sheridan is a highly effective business performance coach, with a particular interest in organisational leadership development. He has worked extensively across sectors including central and local government, universities, the arts, banking and financial services, the police, the power industry and the NHS (including 1:1 coaching at Chief Executive level).

Sheridan also works with regional and national charities, teachers in secondary schools, and has coached on the government's 14–19 Agenda programme for disaffected young people. He has designed and run group workshops, coach training programmes, senior strategy meetings, facilitated training days and action learning sets and has coached directors and senior executives on a 1:1 basis for over ten years.

Sheridan is a founder-director of Walking With Leaders (WWL) a coaching consultancy specialising in improving business performance through leadership and performance coaching, and helping managers become better coaches in their organisations. WWL is an accredited learning centre for the Institute of Leadership and Management and runs accredited coaching programmes to Level 7 Certificate and Diploma.

He is also a Faculty coach and programme leader for the School of Coaching, one of the UK's most respected coaching training organisations. Sheridan is an accredited coach and assessor for the School's prestigious programme certificated by the University of Strathclyde. He is an associate consultant to Campaign for Leadership at the Work Foundation and CFM Consulting. As is a qualified coaching supervisor Sheridan helps other coaches ensure that they are delivering best value and ethical work for their own clients.

Sheridan has written many articles on coaching in journals including *Managing Best Practice* and the *Journal of Change Management*. With a background in publishing management, Sheridan was previously Head of Publishing at the Work Foundation (formerly the Industrial Society) where he developed the publications division into a major award-winning multi-media business, before becoming a full-time business coach in 1997.

As coach, Sheridan works with senior executives to challenge their current thinking and to help create new opportunities for breakthrough performance at work. Central to this is a strong focus on raising personal awareness and clarity on how the coaching will impact results – not just in the short term, but also in the longer term through personal growth and development.

Contact Sheridan via the publisher or through www.walkingwithleaders.com

Foreword

After more than twenty years in the business I am pleased to report that I no longer get asked whether coaching is a fad. That's the good news. The less good news is that there are still many misconceptions as to what coaching is – and little appreciation of what it can be. Coaching is mostly understood, outside the sports context, as 'Executive Coaching', the provision of coaching by an external professional, or as 'Life Coaching'. Within many places of work coaching is seen as remedial, like the failing student getting 'extra coaching'. Few people understand that coaching is an integral part of the line manager's role and few line managers understand that a significant number of the conversations that they have with their direct reports, either could be, or are, coaching conversations. Frequently, when working with manager or leadership populations to develop coaching skills, coaching is seen as an additional burden, another thing to do in an already busy schedule.

Maybe this is just beginning to change. As the economy tightens, the wiser members of the HR community are turning their attention to ensuring that everything is in place to retain and get the best from those who work in their organisations. And many of those are beginning to appreciate that the coaching ability of the leadership and management populations is a critical factor in this and also in creating a high-performance culture.

An individual in work needs to know three critical things that together make up a large part of the conditions needed for high performance. These are: what to do, how to do it and why. Simply put, establishing 'what to do' is a management activity, the 'why' is largely a leadership activity and the 'how to do it' a coaching activity. Leadership, management and coaching come together in the line manager's remit to create the conditions for high performance.

I recall facilitating a meeting of senior managers where there was a general complaint about the performance and intransigence of the middle managers in their sector – they called it the 'permacore': a frozen stratum. I pointed out that if a level of management is under-performing in an organisation then the place to look is one or two levels up – to the leadership, management and coaching capabilities of their leaders.

By far the largest coaching community in the land is the leadership and management population – and they do not know it. Imagine what would happen if that changed, was acknowledged and if that community really delivered. Imagine the productivity, the effectiveness, the creativity, the learning and joy in the workplace that would follow. Imagine that.

Sheridan, I know, does. I have known him for over ten years and his innate wisdom, humanity and pragmatism are present in this book. I commend it to you.

Myles Downey

*Founder of The School of Coaching and author of
Effective Coaching (Thomson/Texere)*

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the hundreds of managers and trainee coaches with whom I have worked over the years. I think it was Frank Lloyd Wright who said that an expert was someone who has stopped learning, so to all those who have allowed me to remain ‘non-expert’, and in the inquiry with them about the possibility of coaching at work, my thanks to you – you know who you are. The same applies to colleagues and friends from The Industrial Society/The Work Foundation: Andrew Forrest and Peter Hill, both of whom gave me valuable feedback on the manuscript; Debra Allcock Tyler, Maria Pemberton, Miki Walleczek, Patrick Burns and Tony Morgan.

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My thanks to editors Lisa Corado and Lucy Muir-Smith, who have been instrumental in guiding this book to print and to publisher John Martin for having faith that it might even sell a few copies.

And finally to my partner Anita and sons Rob and Dunc, patient and accepting in so many ways, my thanks, and at last you can have the computer back.

About the book

This book is primarily for managers who want to improve their own performance, and the performance of their teams (also, coaches who work with managers and teams will find it useful).

The aim of *Core Coaching* is to help managers appreciate that they have a dual role – that of managing *and* coaching – and for them to use that appreciation more effectively in their day-to-day conversations at work. In the Introduction that follows I have explained why I believe coaching to be so important at work, and why it is worth the effort to create coaching cultures in our workplaces.

Chapter 1 is an overview of coaching at work, as a manager and team coach, and of how mentoring fits into development at work, as well as giving a holistic approach to workplace coaching (five-way coaching), ethics and supervision.

Chapter 2 describes eight key areas of capability that the really effective manager or performance coach demonstrates in their work. These eight capabilities make up the acronym STAMINAS, and each is discussed in detail in this section.

Chapter 3 consists of a non-scientific, self-score coaching style questionnaire. Using your understanding of the eight STAMINAS, your answers to this simple questionnaire will help you to identify your own particular coaching style from four main style categories: Creative, Offensive, Relational and Empirical (CORE). Each style is described, with a few pointers about how to develop a more rounded style.

Finally, in Chapter 4, there is a tools and techniques section which describes a number of ways to make your coaching more effective, drawn from my own personal coaching practice and experience.

Introduction

WHY COACHING AT WORK WORKS

Although coaching is rapidly becoming a professional discipline of considerable complexity, underpinned by much psychological research, published books and ethics and standards, at its heart still lies the message of the Greek philosopher, Epicurus:

There are few better remedies for anxiety than thought. In writing a problem down or airing it in conversation, we let its essential aspects emerge. And, by knowing its character, we remove, if not the problem itself, then its secondary, aggravating characteristics of confusion, displacement and surprise.

It is these ‘aggravating characteristics’ that cause us all so many problems – fear, doubt, confusion, poor focus, lack of confidence or self-esteem – whether you are a world-class athlete, professional musician, six-year-old child in the school playground, manager or chief executive.

For all of us, one of the biggest ‘aggravating characteristics’ is other people – the way we think about them, the way we listen to them and the way we have got used to being heard by them. In fact, this is *the* aggravating characteristic which makes ordinary conversations loaded from the very beginning: we simply do not listen to understand or appreciate, or listen without judgement. We listen for the most part simply to respond to be clever, appear knowledgeable, retain position or win in some way. We are ready with advice, instructions, excuses or justifications and this has been our collective experience of conversation since we were each very young. In effect we become imprisoned by these learned responses, each of us living in a world that occurs as shaped by them – and this greatly reduces our capacity to respond to the world as it actually is.

A letter to the editor in the international *National Geographic* magazine (March 2008) from the psychoanalyst Paul Heber states:

My theory is that we do not store stimuli, we only store our responses to stimulus. From age zero and even earlier, we are bombarded by stimuli, so that we constantly respond. We store these responses and they become our subconscious. The stimuli get stored as memories only on the conscious level. The task of psychoanalysis is to help bring the subconscious responses into consciousness, where we are able to take charge of them. As long as they remain in the subconscious, they are in charge of us.

Coaching is definitely *not* psychoanalysis or therapy, but there is a parallel here. Coaching does have a clear and powerful role to play in helping the coachee understand how and why they are responding to certain stimuli – ‘aggravating characteristics’ – and to develop more effective strategies to achieve their goals. Coaching raises awareness to sharpen perception of occurrences and allows for different, more effective responses.

ICE AND WATER

I sometimes compare a person’s thinking to water in ice form – very often it is inflexible and ‘frozen’ – in this state our capacity to be fully aware, think clearly and to respond with effective agility is diminished. We are stuck in a certain view of things, interpreting events in the same old way and reacting to them in our personal, historic pattern. Telling someone what to do when their thinking is in this state is like chipping away at it with an ice pick (which of course is part of *our* own worldview), in the hope that you will chip off enough ice for the coachee to get to something useful underneath – they might, but figuratively at least, it is a painful process, inelegant and not in the control of the coachee – they aren’t holding the ice pick, after all. Besides, how does the wielder of this figurative ice pick know where the best place is to offer their ‘help’?

An effective coach will create what I call a *listening space* (more about this later), which in effect allows the ice to thaw and so to become fluid – thinking becomes easier, less constrained and moves with fluidity to make connections it otherwise could not when it was solid. The coach does not wield an ice pick but uses the power of dialogue to create a shift in the coachee’s mental state.

So, coaching is not an ordinary conversation. Coaching is an extraordinary conversation: a dialogue based on mutual trust, respect and with only one purpose, the achievement of specific performance goals. Coaching is not easy because it requires us to do something we may not have done for many years – to shut up, empty ourselves of the need to respond and to listen without judgement in order to truly enter into another’s worldview. In doing so, we allow them space to enter that world too, but in an enquiring and structured way. Only then can the coach help the coachee to explore their own reality and to find and own their own solutions.

Underpinning any coaching conversation is the fundamental belief that every individual has huge potential which can be unlocked to achieve outstanding personal performance, if only the person could ‘get out of their own way’. We are our own worst enemies when it comes to personal performance – who in the world does not have nagging self-doubt, crises of confidence, worries about personal or professional issues, some lurking occasional lack of self-esteem as well as gaps in knowledge and skills? – and these detract from our personal performance.

Coaching is about helping the individual to become focused and engaged and so adapt more quickly and perform more effectively in the moment. The more effectively we can learn, the more quickly we can adapt to circumstances, and this translates spontaneously into far higher levels of performance and goal achievement. Telling people what to do so they can perform better is superficial and leads to small incremental rises in performance in the short term. However, usually it does not help people to learn; learning is fundamentally a *choice* by the learner. You can force people to do something but you can never force people to *choose* to do something – only they have that power – and this lies at the core of intrinsic motivation. So, powerful learning – and therefore powerful performance – is a matter of choice brought about by raised personal awareness, not coercion. As Arthur Schopenhauer said:

We learn by rearranging what we know into a more meaningful configuration.

Generations of world-class performers in every field of human endeavour, including the workplace, know that to achieve their full, extraordinary human potential and to be outstandingly successful, coaching makes all the difference between winning and mediocrity. This occurs only through generating awareness and intrinsic motivation in the coachee, rather than telling them what to do.

Throughout this book, the approach to coaching I espouse is essentially non-directive: helping another to find their own solution, *not* by imposing one's own advice or solution upon them. That does not preclude those times when telling or instructing *is* the best way to help someone else move forward; it simply means that the coach has a mindset of *non-directive intent*, which is a very different place to listen from than that of the teacher, instructor or manager.

Ultimately, no human being can be with another and not, in some way, project subconsciously. Even in total silence we are communicating and influencing the other in subtle and hidden ways. The effective coach (and communicator) will be more aware of what is happening in the space between themselves and the coachee and will notice and use this information to act appropriately in the service of the coachee and their performance goals.

WHY COACHING IS IMPORTANT AT WORK

Work is about the search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor, for a sort of life rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying.

— Studs Terkel, social anthropologist

Most people spend more time at work than any other activity in their life and many spend the rest of it trying either to forget about it or, if they can't, then worrying about it. Work is seen as a necessary evil by millions of people, the

workplace as somewhere to go and freeze-frame their lives for eight hours, every day, before going home and *really* starting to live. This is a tragedy on an epic scale, because the workplace can be made to be exciting and engaging and work can be made to be challenging and meaningful, giving individuals a real sense of personal purpose and satisfaction.

It is managers who are accountable for getting the best results that they can from their staff and, on the whole, the results are mediocre. Generally speaking, this is not because they don't try, or don't have the best interests of their staff or organisation at heart. It is because they don't know how to use managing as a way to get the best from people. This is not surprising, as managing is *not* the conversation to get the best from people – coaching is!

Coaching is specifically designed as a conversation to improve performance, in whatever walk of life. At work, it is primarily the manager who has the coaching role, and yet they spend most of the time telling people what to do instead of helping them see for themselves what they could do. This shift of emphasis – from telling to facilitating – is crucial, as it engages ownership, free thinking and responsibility to act. These are the hallmarks of the learning organisation: one which nurtures and harnesses individual learning in the service of organisational goals. Even in the twenty-first century we still have a tendency to ignore the axiom, 'With every pair of hands you get a free brain'. Yet we all know that the one main competitive advantage that any organisation has over its competitors is its people. As Arie de Geus, business strategist and former corporate planning director at Shell, said:

The ability to learn faster than the competition is often the only sustainable competitive advantage a company can have.

The word 'sustainable' is important: tell someone what to do and they will be back the next day with another question to be answered, and often it is the wrong question. Constantly reinventing the wheel and creating organisational bottlenecks is not a sustainable practice. It merely perpetuates the status quo, entrenches behaviours and stifles creative thinking and action.

Managers can break through this stagnation by generating a different kind of conversation that is performance-focused, engaging and allows others to be responsible and take action. These conversations tap into people's innate talent, personal desire for achievement and sense of ownership. Everyone wants to be great, show up well, enjoy their working life and be successful. It is the manager's role and responsibility to make that happen in the service of their organisation, stakeholders and staff. And coaching is the way to do it.

1 Managers coaching at work

1.1 THE MANAGER AS COACH

How coaching fits in the organisation

We all want to find meaning and value in our work and to feel a sense of purpose and self-esteem. In this day and age, this calls upon a very different management style. Managing people in the traditional sense just doesn't work any more. Indeed, the word 'manager' is derived from the Italian word *maneggiare*: to control or train, especially horses. 'Carrot and stick' might have worked in organisations 20 or 30 years ago, but not in the twenty-first century. The issue of control is critical: it is a basic human driver to 'be in control', and anything that might contribute to a sense of loss of control – for example, suspending one's values, opinions or judgements when listening authentically to someone else – is a tough development issue for nearly all of us.

Coaching is a style of conversation that is more open, honest and engaging. It is geared towards helping people to think and perform for themselves, rather than rein them in. However, for coaching to succeed in organisations, it must be *integrated into everyday usage and language*, and it must be seen and heard to be integrated through the behaviours of the most senior managers.

Isn't coaching just another management fad?

In a way, it is the other way around. Coaching has been the way in which interested and empathetic individuals have helped and developed others for many thousands of years. For as long as there have been human parents and children, there has been some form of coaching. The concept of organisational management is far more recent, and evolved with the emergence of procedures and rules that are necessary to stop an organisation from sliding into chaos. So, management is about boundaries, while coaching is about growth. The difficult trick for the manager is to separate out these two conversations: maintaining appropriate boundaries (which clearly organisations need to operate effectively), while encouraging learning and development within these boundaries.

The question for every manager is: how do I maintain appropriate boundaries (managing) and create an environment for learning, adaptation, agility and action (coaching) at the same time?

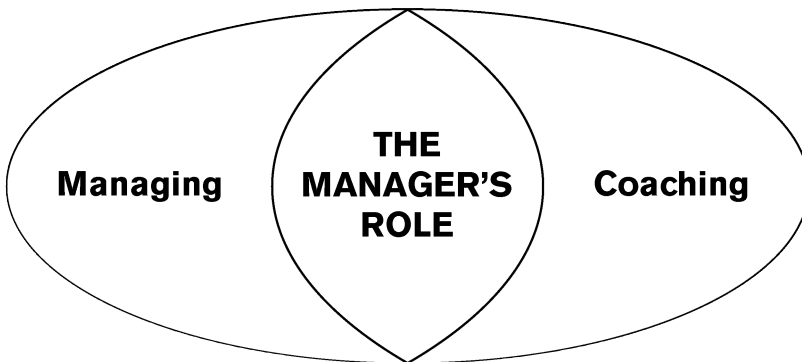
The manager's role

The manager has two clear roles to perform simultaneously – managing and coaching. The clearer they can separate or distinguish between these roles, the more effective they can be. This is easy to say, but not so easy to do.

Managing

Managers are accountable for delivering on their objectives through strategic leadership (the processes or systems that all agree will move the organisation towards its stated destination) and the appropriate and effective use of the resources at their disposal. It is entirely appropriate for managers to have conversations around:

- performance management
- targets and setting goals
- delegation
- accountability
- organising and monitoring resources
- evaluation and measurement
- compliance with procedural and behavioural norms.



Management conversations are all about the *what* of the individual's level of performance, as judged by the standards set by the organisation. By their nature there is an element of judgement and imposition about them. Management conversations are generally centred in the manager's own experience of the overall context, their departmental and personal objectives and those of the coachee or subordinate. They will have a legitimate agenda and expectation around performance, standards, the accountability of the coachee and cultural norms ('the way we behave and have conversations around here'). In this regard,

managers have a clear and legitimate agenda, some aspects of which may seem to fly in the face of simultaneously acting as manager-coach.

Coaching

Coaching conversations are all about enhancing the individual's awareness of *how* they can achieve optimum performance. They are about helping the person to play the very best game they can (within the rules). This is a very different type of conversation, focusing on the manager's personal leadership and their capacity to draw out and nurture the innate talent of their people through:

- enabling
- responsibility
- awareness
- intrinsic motivation
- self-confidence
- personal choice
- engaging discretionary effort.

There is no element of judgement, criticism or imposition in a coaching conversation. The purpose is only and always to help the coachee to raise their level of awareness around a task or issue in a motivating and energetic way, so that they are able to see more ways forward than before and are inspired to act through their own self-discovery. Coaching conversations are generally centred in the coachee's experience: what they are aware of, feeling, learning and experiencing and what they can do for themselves to improve and achieve more.

Obviously, managing and coaching conversations will overlap to a degree. Sometimes the manager-coach will have to impose 'rules' which might constrain the coaching, or help the coachee to understand that the ideas they have come up with won't work for specific contextual reasons. You cannot 'coach out' from other people information you know and which they don't – you just have to tell them, otherwise it is unhelpful.

Sometimes the manager will have to direct the conversation to a particular performance issue, target or goal on which the coachee needs to work. This is perfectly appropriate in the management role. However, once directed to that place, the conversation should then focus back on what the coachee can do for themselves, not what the manager thinks the coachee should be doing about it. Similarly, the manager-coach will have views or feedback which might be useful for the person to know in order to increase the data – and so the self-awareness – available to them. The difficulty is that the manager and the coach in this conversation *are the same person* and it takes time and practice to become skilled at the duality. The conversations may overlap, but they are *distinct*.

***Focus on the manager's experience***

- more centred in their own experience
- strategic leadership
- focus on context
- narrower focus
- seeks decisions
- personal agenda
- transactional
- more assertive
- holds the reins

Focus on the coachee's experience

- more centred in the coachee's experience
- personal leadership
- focus on content
- wideangle lens
- elicits choices
- no personal agenda
- relational
- more allowing
- gives the horse its head

There are hidden rules in every workplace which are never discussed but which nevertheless form part of the prevailing culture, such as:

- teamwork is espoused but personal performance is rewarded;
- values such as learning and honesty are promoted but often the perceived personal price is too high;
- learning is a luxury that no one can afford.

These rules reflect enlightened self-interest, and are powerful organisational drivers of behaviour which are buried beneath the surface and deeply immersed in the culture of the organisation. The new manager's role must be to realign the hidden rules to meet organisational objectives. For the most part managers are driven, like everyone else, by these deeper and unspoken behavioural drivers. To be an effective manager-coach is to have the courage to surface, challenge and rewrite ineffective or outmoded values, rules or attitudes that stifle potential, growth and development – both their own and those of others.

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Coaching is – or should be – an integral part of the line manager's role. It is essential for cultivating a more energetic, responsible and engaged workforce. Coaching helps to create and sustain organisations in which people sort out their own problems, are more creative and solution-focused and give their best because they want to.

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