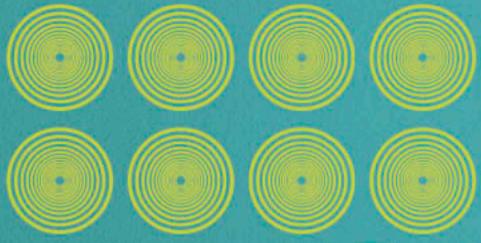


THE LEADER'S GUIDE TO MANAGING PEOPLE

HOW TO USE SOFT SKILLS TO GET HARD RESULTS



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The Leader's Guide to Managing People

Know-how, Affirm and action, and Review and reality check (see Figure 4.3).

It is important to ask specific questions about the degree of will and commitment

Outcome

The coach starts off by finding out the coachee's desired outcome. This is possibly an even better question than simply asking for goals. Many of us don't have a specific idea of what our goals are in a particular situation, but being asked about the outcome forces us to reflect on what we would like to achieve. This in itself would be a good coaching session even if we didn't get any further. The coachee would then have a much clearer idea of what they wanted.

Scaling

This means finding out where the person is in relation to the desired outcome on a scale of 1 to 10. So, for example, if my outcome is to have a better relationship with my boss, then the question would be, 'Where on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being high and 1 low, would you say your relationship is right now?' If the coachee answered that it is a 3 out of 10, for example, the next question would be, 'Where on the scale would you like it to be?' To which the answer might be a 5. From this you would be able to ask, 'What would a 5 look like or feel like?' You could then ask specific questions about what your boss would be doing, or what you would be doing in a 5 out of 10 relationship.

This forces you to imagine positive specific actions that you and your boss would be taking in this improved relationship. It also has the advantage of making you realise that you

are not just a passive victim but have an active role in this situation. It's not just about what your boss could be doing differently but also about what you could do differently. Once you are able to imagine what your boss could be doing differently, this allows you to ask your boss for specific behaviours that they can then respond to.

Know-how

This is about finding out what the coachee's strengths are. What resources do they have? When have they overcome a similar type of issue? Too often people see themselves as passive victims with no resources, but in fact it is very likely that they have strengths and resources that could be brought to bear on their current issue. Again the coach will help the coachee to focus on their resources and energy rather than their weaknesses.

Affirm and action

This is a two-step process. First, the coach will give a positive affirmation to the coachee. This is based on ideas around positive psychology, which we discuss further in Chapter 14. The coach will reflect back something positive that the coachee is already doing in the situation. This is important because it gives self-belief and confidence, but also, and importantly, it gives energy. It might be something like, 'I like the way you stood up for yourself in that difficult situation. It showed real strength and resilience.'

It's not easy for most managers to give positive affirmations, but we feel it is critical to notice people's positive behaviours and strengths and above all to share them with the coachee. Again, we go into more detail in Chapter 14.

The second step of the process for Affirm and action is to ask the coachee in some detail about what specific actions they will now take to address the issue – the more specific the better. Don't allow generalisations, make sure you get specific actions with time frames. If the coachee says, 'I'll talk to my manager,' that's not good enough. Ask them not only where and when but more importantly what exactly they will say and how they will say it. Get them to say it out loud to you so that you get a sense of how it might come across.

Again, you might meet with some resistance here, but if you don't press for specifics then you are not helping the coachee to really think the issue through.

As a matter of principle it is better to get the coachee to take a series of small steps rather than going for ambitious targets which they are unlikely to achieve. For example, if you were coaching someone who does no physical activity, you might want to hear them say they will start by taking a 15-minute walk every day rather than them tell you they will go from nothing to running five miles a day within a week.

Review and reality check

This can be done in two separate stages. First of all during the coaching session, when you can look back and summarise what has been said, and then agree on specific actions and time frames. It's the time to ensure that you are both in agreement with what has been said and agree a time to meet up and review the actions. The second step is the review meeting after the coachee has had a chance to implement their agreed actions. This is where you compare what the coachee said they would do with what they actually did and what happened as a result. This may lead to more coaching or a tweak in agreed actions, plus any other follow-up plans. Think of it as a sort of reality check: what did they actually do and do they need to come back

to Outcome and reconsider what they want to achieve and what is actually possible?

Traps to avoid when coaching

When you are coaching someone, it is very easy to develop unhelpful behaviours and bad practices. Here are some of the traps you may fall into:

- Taking the monkey. There is an expression, 'to take the monkey', meaning that you end up taking on other people's problems and issues. This is extremely common in management for two reasons. One, the manager very often thinks that their job is to solve problems, and the other is that, as a result of hierarchy and command and control culture, many employees have become used to letting someone else do their thinking for them. So as a coach you must avoid taking responsibility for other people's issues. Your job is to make them do the thinking, not solve the problem for them.
- Giving advice. In our workshops we observe many examples of managers whose default style is to go immediately to giving advice what we call the 'Why don't you?' or 'If I were you' style of coaching. We know that's it's difficult to resist giving advice, and of course sometimes advice is necessary, but it is not coaching! So instead of giving advice, put it aside and tell yourself that you are there to help the coachee find their own answers and use the coaching processes mentioned to focus your mind on getting the coachee to reflect and come up with options.
- Offering a solution. An employee comes to the manager with an issue and instead of asking questions and listening, the manager feels obliged to offer their solution to the employee. Apart from the fact that the boss is not

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always right, this leads to a mental laziness on the part of the employee, who is not being forced to think the issue through and come up with different courses of action.

- Interrupting. It is such a common thing for managers to do. Sometimes it comes from arrogance, but often it comes from a sense of trying to be helpful. But interrupting people is an insidious thing. People have a basic psychological need to be heard and listened to, and you are denying that if you interrupt them. You are also telling them that their point of view is less important than yours, which is disruptive to the coaching process.
- Not being fully present. Be fully present and in the moment when you are coaching. It means that the most important thing you can do is give the coachee your presence and full attention. It's not always necessary to know what your next question is in advance, but if you are fully focused on the coachee, with your mind firmly in the present, you will notice more and hear more and your next question will be easier.
- Inappropriate non-verbal behaviour. Your coachee will be observing you at the same time as you are observing them. This means that you have to pay attention to your non-verbal behaviour. You need to be able to show interest and energy. Avoid showing any impatience, don't fidget and don't look at your watch during the session, it will just make the coachee feel that they need to hurry up. Remember to set guidelines about confidentiality and timing at the start of the session.
- Being distracted. This can easily happen. You, too, have many things on your mind and you can allow your thoughts to wander during the process. This means that you are not focusing on the present situation, not listening closely enough to what is being said and not paying attention to the nuances and changes of tone. You then stay on a superficial level and don't pick up on the

- underlying issues. Also, your coachee will notice that you are not paying attention and will conclude that you are not taking them or the issue or both seriously.
- Interrogating. This can be a risk if the coach starts asking too many closed questions in an impatient and hurried way. The coachee does not feel listened to and gets the impression that the coach is not trying to explore the issue together but is simply looking for facts which could be used to criticise. You must also pay attention to tone of voice. The process can seem like an interrogation if you are not taking account of the coachee's feelings and emotions.
- Blaming and judging. If you become critical of the coachee and their actions, and they feel that you are blaming them, it will make them defensive. The sense that you are being judgemental comes from the words you use, of course, but also from the tone of your voice. When coaching someone you must remain open-minded, neutral and non-judgemental. You are trying to get at the reality and truth of things, and criticising is the surest way of making the coachee clam up, so you will have achieved nothing.

When should we coach?

The short answer here is, 'all the time'. As mentioned above, one of the objections to coaching is that it takes too much time. The opposite is true: simply telling people what to do is what actually consumes time! Too often we are tempted to use the 'Why don't you' model, instead of asking people what their thoughts and options are. Almost any interaction can be done in a coaching style, although we don't recommend asking people for their different options and alternatives in the middle of a crisis. However, coaching is an opportunity to review past crises and learn from them.