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Team and Peer Coaching:

By Dr. Clare Beckett-McInroy

Team coaching (teams being 'facilitated' or 'coached' by a team's leader or by an internal or external Coach) is on the rise. It is a fabulous tool for employee engagement, team development, innovation and creating ideas, as well as a way of reducing toxicity in organisations. To do this a Coach, in addition to the competencies required for 1-1 coaching, requires further specialised competencies. →

network

The Way Ahead



No one grows as a leader without the support of other people. Effective peer-to-peer coaching can offer the encouragement people need to overcome the fear of starting something new. Peer Coaches, like professional Coaches, can also hold their Coachee accountable for moving in a new direction.

Being non-directive

Enabling team coaching and facilitating peer coaching with your team can accelerate learning and ensure that the best-fit solutions come to fruition. This article explains how to set up non-directive team coaching and a peer coaching network, in the Socratic tradition (the Coachee discovers solutions to their issues through dialogue), as opposed to instructional, evaluative and directive feedback (in which an expert Coach ‘solves’ the Coachee’s problem) – the latter is actually mentoring and is disempowering. Through compassionate, caring enquiry, everyone can develop and improve their abilities through practice and reflection on what works (and what does not).

Peer Coaching

Peer coaching is powerful. It will not absolve you of responsibility in making tough decisions about pay and promotion and everything else you must do within your role. Yet, to avoid initiating team and peer coaching, is to disempower, to inhibit learning and progress and to reduce capacity building. There is a sense of camaraderie and good feeling that comes when you have a positive impact as a Coach on another person’s well-being, and peer Coaches learn things about themselves both through the act of coaching, and, of course, by receiving coaching themselves. They also deepen their relationship with colleagues, which can be very powerful.

Where to start?

To construct a peer coaching network, start small and aim for quality and impact. Set people up in triads or ask employees to find two other people so they can take turns serving as both Coach and Coachee for each other: A coaches B, B coaches C, and C coaches A. Suggest each person start by discussing the results they want. The more open Coachees are about goals, the more they will increase commitment, and the more likely their goals will be realised.

It is also useful to talk about how the triad will work together, establishing expectations, time to meet, and understanding each other’s interests, hopes, and fears. Clarify how each member will play the Coach and Coachee roles and suggest adjustments as needed. Encourage each person to gain a preliminary understanding of each other’s key relationships at work, at home, and in the community. But the most important ground rules are that “You choose what you want to disclose...” and what is confidential stays that way!



Co-Creating Strong Coaching Relationships

Provide your team with ways to design the relationship and co-create clear boundaries and agendas for team coaching, including confidentiality, phone calls and some basic guidelines followed by most Coaches. Ask your team to follow these guidelines to get the most out of their peer-to-peer coaching relationships:

- 1 Show you care about helping to enable the team as a collective as well as individuals.
- 2 Be as aware as possible of your own biases as a Coach and be subjective and non-judgemental.
- 3 Stay in touch with the reality your team is facing.
- 4 Be confident when asking ‘naïve’ questions, they are extremely beneficial.
- 5 Encourage your Coachees to get more help when needed, from all sources, including 1:1 coaching as well as team psychometrics to identify strengths and development areas.
- 6 Be open, honest and transparent about your role and what you can deliver.

The heart of non-directive, or developmental, peer-to-peer coaching is using powerful questioning, ensuring the timing and communication of a question has intention for the impact you want for your team.

Change?

Many people fear change because it forces them into unknown territory, where things are unpredictable and unfamiliar. And yet there are predictable stages people go through when they undertake intentional change. Coaches help others to see and feel the need to create meaningful, sustainable change.

What’s the issue?

Simply identifying the need for change can be difficult, as many of us ignore information that disconfirms our current perceptions. Framing this is a problem that can actually inhibit progress. Encourage the team to share what is going well and the ways in they can improve things in that area, and draw upon them.

Deepening awareness

Coaches can help identify blind spots by encouraging self-reflection about things that are not obvious to their team. Asking these questions increases awareness:

- ▶ As you think about your goals, what’s not working well in your life?
- ▶ What are the consequences of this issue for you and the important people in your life?
- ▶ What is the source of the need to change – is it you or is it external?
- ▶ What if this stays the same?

What will change bring?

We naturally tend to lean towards continuing the status quo through an ‘away from’ mentality – ‘I don’t want this because...’. Carol Dweck advocates a ‘towards’ mentality – ‘I want this because...’. This can help raise passion and urgency by asking questions such as:

- ▶ Looking ahead, what will happen if you don’t change?
- ▶ What will happen if you do change?
- ▶ What are you choosing?
- ▶ What’s important about that choice?
- ▶ What will it bring to you?
- ▶ In what ways does it resonate with your values? (...your organisational values)?

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Making Choices

Making a choice to change is a crucial moment. It marks the point when minds shift and desired futures are clear, as are their benefits. It is also a potentially tricky point, hence the CoachME model incorporates transition planning as a discrete facet to forward action and to avoid reverting to the comfort zone or previous action. Coaches can help Coachees reach and move beyond this point by asking:

- ▶ What have you decided to do differently and why?
- ▶ What is the ultimate outcome?
- ▶ What’s next?

Coaching in action

Effective Coaches ask their teams to think out loud about what to do differently, how to overcome setbacks or hurdles, and what skills or sources of support are needed. You can help your team discover specific ideas for how to better accomplish goals by exploring the following:

- ▶ What specifically will you do, and by when?
- ▶ In what ways will you measure progress?
- ▶ What stands in the way, and how will you overcome these barriers?
- ▶ In what ways will you generate support?

Commitment can decrease without a sense of urgency. Coaches can challenge this by asking:

- ▶ What if this is easier than you think?
- ▶ What are the first steps – and the next steps – you will take?
- ▶ What will enable you to ensure a sense of urgency?
- ▶ In what ways can this be sustained?
- ▶ In what ways do you show true commitment?

Sustaining Impact

Encouragement at every small step builds and sustains momentum – all action should be celebrated and ‘failures’ should be too, as learning opportunities. As a Coach, you can provide frequent reinforcement and celebrate your Coachee’s successes to bolster confidence and help them manage setbacks. Key questions here include:

- ▶ What impact have you had?
- ▶ In what ways have your accomplishments benefited your team?
- ▶ What small, smarter step will help you build momentum?
- ▶ In what ways can I support you?
- ▶ What else can support your mission?

Mentor Coaching?

Lead Coaches and Team Coaches need Coaches themselves. What is also useful is Mentor coaching – coaching on their coaching competencies through audio or video recordings or thought reflections and even through the mentor Coach observing real time.

Working at both providing and receiving peer coaching requires an investment of time as well as development of skills, knowledge and behaviour. Few people are naturally gifted in this area yet it can be learned – with practice. As the leader of your team, establishing a peer Coaching network can empower your colleagues, expand their skill sets, enrich them personally and professionally and ultimately help your organisation. It’s free, it’s fun and it’s more than just fashionable – it is rewarding and proven to have an impact. **BIG**



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