



The Coaching Manager

Developing Top Talent in Business

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

When managers communicate a genuine interest in helping rather than evaluating their employees, they create opportunities for everyone to learn. Managers who try to help employees, as a *routine* part of their management activities, learn and become more productive in the process.

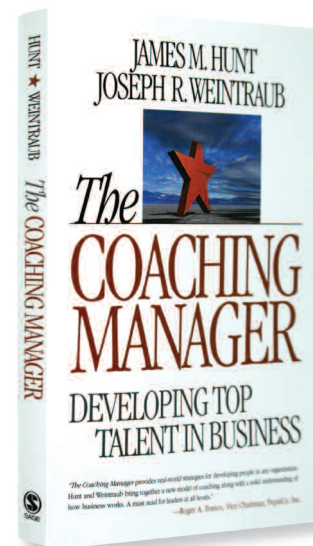
In *The Coaching Manager*, James Hunt and Joseph Weintraub introduce an easy-to-implement developmental coaching model based on their extensive work with thousands of managers, executives and MBA students. The goal is for managers to help employees learn to be more productive on a day-to-day basis. This model encourages employees to take greater responsibility for their learning and development while forging a helping relationship between manager and employee. Such an approach to management lightens the emphasis on evaluation and creates learning opportunities for all involved.

The Coaching Manager includes true stories, tools and action checklists to deepen skills and understanding. The lessons it provides will benefit managers, leaders and entrepreneurs in business and not-for-profit organizations; those in MBA programs; students in leadership, organizational development and human resources management; and participants in executive training programs.

This summary is about how business leaders, often simply referred to as “managers,” help their employees learn and develop through coaching.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to use real-world strategies to develop the leadership potential of your people.
- Ways to create a coaching-friendly environment within your organization.
- How to create real opportunities for your people to learn.
- How to use a new model of management coaching to become a master coach.



by James M. Hunt and
Joseph R. Weintraub

CONTENTS

An Overview of Developmental Coaching

Page 2

The 'Coaching Mind-Set'

Page 3

Creating a Coaching Friendly Context

Page 4

Focusing on What is Important

Page 5

What Does It All Mean?

Page 6

Coaching and Career Development

Page 7

Coaching and Organizations

Page 8

THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE COACHING MANAGER

by James M. Hunt and Joseph R. Weintraub

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Introduction: The Coaching Manager

Effective coaching managers are successful because they not only give feedback, but they give feedback to people they have *helped make ready for feedback* through the process of reflection. Reflection is the step too often missing in employee development. Reflection allows individual learners to pursue what is important to them, not just what is important to the manager. Reflection allows people to take ownership of their own problems.

Learner ownership of the learning process drives development because it fosters and validates the importance of self-directed learning as an important aspect of successful job performance.

Isaac Stern, the great violinist who died in 2001, captured the power of this concept when he described the outcome of his work with his own mentor: “He taught me to teach myself, which is the greatest thing a teacher can do.”

The Transition to Becoming a Coaching Manager

The new coaching manager must be willing to take the small amount of time necessary to be effective at harvesting the opportunities for learning at the individual and organizational level, which are readily available in most firms. The challenge for the manager has as much or more to do with changing his or her mind-set as it does with finding more hours in the day.

There does seem to be one ingredient that is critical to the success of coaching managers: The best all seem to have an interest in helping others. You can't help people

learn if you see them as simply a means to an end. Although most organizational mission statements these days say something about respect for the individual, effective coaching really requires that respect. Inherent in this respect is a bit of trust in the notion that most people want to grow. The coaching manager has to be willing to step back and trust that his or her employees share the same overall goals and want to be entrusted with their own learning.

The most effective model for leadership is one that promotes shared effort toward and responsibility for achieving a goal, and builds organizational capability along the way. ●

An Overview of Developmental Coaching

The basic model of developmental coaching includes the following elements:

- **A coaching friendly context.** Coaching interactions need to be “safe.” Normally, such interactions should have little or nothing to do with evaluation or performance appraisal.
- **A helpful mind-set.** There are two related components of a coaching mind-set: developing a coaching identity and learning to be helpful rather than evaluative.
- **A “coach-able” learner.** Good coaching requires a motivated coachee who (a) wants to learn, (b) is able to tolerate the process of reflecting on his or her work and (c) therefore can deal with feedback that may be appropriately challenging.
- **Stopping the action and starting the coaching dialogue.** Coaching requires that the manager stop the



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Summary: THE COACHING MANAGER

action and instigate a dialogue using techniques of inquiry.

- **Knowing what is important.** The coaching manager needs a sense of what good performance looks like in order to know what to look for and what kind of feedback is likely to be helpful.

- **Observing without inferring.** Unfortunately, even with firsthand data, observer bias quickly becomes a problem. The most important point, however, is to acknowledge that such bias exists and is a potential problem for all of us.

- **Providing balanced and helpful feedback.** Ideally, feedback holds up an accurate mirror to coachees, so they can see themselves and take ownership of their actions or results.

- **Collaboratively interpreting what needs to change.** Coaches and coachees must maintain a collaborative dialogue that will encourage coachees to consider the reasons for their behavior.

- **Setting a goal for change and following up.** Change requires that the coachee have an opportunity to practice the desired behaviors; just attending a course, for instance, may not be sufficient. ●

The 'Coaching Mind-Set'

Coaching managers have an overriding attitude of helpfulness when trying to coach others.

Managers who coach want to *help*, as opposed to fix or change others. They like seeing others succeed. They seem to get a kick out of having a chance to admire the good work of others. As one coaching manager said, "I keep track of them in their careers. I hear about their accomplishments. I like to think that in a way, I have contributed to their success."

Coaching managers believe that by helping their employees develop, everybody comes out ahead. By coaching their employees and aiding their development, coaching managers assume that they will build the overall capability of their businesses.

Coaching managers also show less need for control. An emphasis on "results no matter what" can make it hard for managers to coach rather than do. The coaches who do the best jobs are those who are able to tolerate the potential for at least some failure.

In addition, coaching managers believe that most people really do want to learn. Coaching managers are much like gardeners. They plant the flowers (hire the right employees), create a context, provide some support and are there to help out. However, having done that,

The Goals of Coaching

The ultimate goals of coaching are:

- To promote employee development through learning.
- To build organizational capability through sharing learning with others.
- To build better relationships and more effective communications in general in an organization.
- To promote employee retention through the provision of experiences that help employees meet their personal goals for growth.

Seizing the opportunity to create positive, learning-oriented dialogues presents a simple way to meet those goals.

they don't always expect every effort to bear fruit. Most coaches report that, as they mature, they come to accept that some people don't want to be coached and that they may not be able to make a difference in their development.

Coaching managers also show empathy in their dealings with others. They tend to be able to put themselves in another person's shoes, rather than judging an individual solely on the basis of surface behaviors. ●

The 'Coach-Able' Learner

What behaviors does the individual demonstrate who is capable of effectively engaging with a coaching manager? Despite the diversity of styles, personalities and cultural backgrounds found in today's work force, it is possible to make some useful generalizations.

First of all, a coachee must be able to reflect on his or her behavior — to step back and examine it from a somewhat objective frame of reference. If you had a particularly troubling meeting with your team and you want to learn something from the event, you need to be able to describe to yourself and to someone else what happened. Furthermore, you need to be able to think about what you did differently this time in contrast to your previous efforts.

Ideally, effective coachees are curious about their performance and the challenges of continuous improvement. The coachee is like a scientist, trying to understand the laws that govern his or her actions and the actions of others, and to exercise some control through that understanding.

Summary: THE COACHING MANAGER

Shame

Effective coachees are able to accept that someone else may have more knowledge or be more effective than they are. Feelings of shame make an individual want to keep awareness of his or her mistakes from others, which can make coaching nearly impossible. Effective coachees are able to honestly raise their concerns with their coaching managers, rather than succumb to such inhibitions.

The effective coachee needs to be able to listen. He or she needs to be able to tolerate balanced feedback and consider the meaning of what the coach is trying to say.

Finally, effective coachees are motivated by coaching. Having received feedback, considered its meaning and considered what they might do differently next time, they are anxious to practice. They take full responsibility for change and want to exercise their responsibility so that the learning can continue and they can assess their progress. ●

Creating a Coaching Friendly Context

In the coaching friendly context, learning is taken for granted to be an important, if not always directly discussed, ingredient of both personal development and business performance. People in a coaching friendly context naturally and informally reflect on their actions, discuss their problems and goals, and ask for feedback and advice.

Here are the values and beliefs that serve as a foundation for such a coaching friendly context:

- **Trust and a large measure of openness are valued.** Trust in the relationship between manager and employee is probably the most important element of a coaching friendly context.

- **Mistakes are tolerated because they are useful for learning.**

- **The organization pays careful attention to hiring the right people.** It is easier to trust people, even to allow them to make mistakes, if you see them as fundamentally in the right job and being able to perform that job to at least a minimal degree.

- **Learning for the long term is important.** Attention to learning, which ultimately validates a manager's efforts to coach, signals to everyone that the group exists for both today and tomorrow.

- **Reward systems encourage managers to spend time coaching.** Closely related to a value on learning

are reward systems that create tangible positive outcomes for managers who are effective at employee development.

- **People should feel valued as individuals.** People who feel valued are much more likely to want to learn. They feel that there is a more genuine overlap between the organization's goals and their own personal goals. ●

Stopping the Action and Starting a Coaching Dialogue

In the coaching friendly context, people seize learning and coaching opportunities both formally and informally whenever they can. Most likely, your work is fast-paced and your business unit is filled with people who incessantly focus on action. They need to get it done, now. Somehow, you have to find a way to stop that action, if only briefly, and engage potential coachees in a useful coaching dialogue.

Maintain a Coaching Mind-Set

The first step to stopping the action and starting the dialogue is maintaining a coaching mind-set. Make sure you are ready to coach, not evaluate or appraise performance.

Next, look for useful coaching opportunities before, after and at natural stopping points during an activity. Ask yourself, "What is the learning potential?"

The next step is assessing the timing. Determine if the employee is able to engage with you now about this issue or topic. Decide if you and the employee can make adequate time for the dialogue. Make sure the employee is in a receptive frame of mind and emotional state. Then, take a minute to establish rapport.

Now is the time to ask reflective questions, listen and probe for understanding. When appropriate, ask follow-up questions. While being empathic, help employees think about their roles, their intent and their actions.

Advice

Help the employee define and take ownership of the real issue, challenge or problem about which he or she needs to learn more. Avoid providing premature or gratuitous feedback. Also, avoid giving advice or jumping in with the solution.

Next, ask the employee what he or she would find useful as a next step, unless you feel that, on the basis of the issue or the potential costs of failure, you need to direct the employee to a next step.

Finally, the employee might find targeted advice use-

Summary: THE COACHING MANAGER

ful. However, be wary of giving advice prematurely. Make sure that the employee has done a thorough job of independently thinking it through. The employee must own the solution. ●

Focusing on What Is Important

The notion of the “coaching mirror” can be of enormous value in teaching managers about the somewhat abused concept of feedback. A mirror can send us a powerful message, but it can’t change us. Feedback at its best isn’t designed to change the recipient of the feedback, it is offered as a tool that recipients can use to help them achieve goals to which they are committed.

The coaching manager can greatly enhance the power of the feedback, and therefore the value of the mirror, in two ways. First, the manager can help the coachee focus on what is truly important. Second, the manager can provide the feedback in a way that makes it as useful as possible.

Competency

Coaching managers can’t pay attention to everything, so their focus should begin with what the organization needs for business success. However, it is important to encourage employees to drive the coaching process and their own development. Competency is more than skill. Competencies are skills that are used routinely. We all know people who are extremely good at executing a particular task but hate doing it.

Managers who insist on focusing only on the ability of an employee to deliver should be aware that the mix of great skill and low motivation doesn’t yield sustainable superior results. The best coaching managers are able to manage the tension between the organization’s needs and the individual’s goals. To understand what the employee wants, you must ask, and you must be willing to listen. Although you must focus your coaching efforts on what your organization needs, that goal will be best served by making sure that the people who are trying to fulfill those organizational needs are not only good at doing so, but want to do so as well. ●

Observing What Is Important, Effectively

A tendency to draw inferences can make it difficult for managers to draw an accurate picture of a coachee’s job performance.

Effective feedback is possible only when it is based on *accurate observations (or other kinds of performance data)*. If

the coaching manager has bad data, the feedback will be flawed and the result will be a lack of learning and even greater defensiveness on the part of the employee.

Coaching managers must gather information about the performance of others and make that information useful.

To get the most from various sources of performance data, always strive for specific examples of work. This is easiest to do when the source of data is your direct observation as the coaching manager. It is the standard against which all other sources of data must be judged.

Always follow up on formal and informal multi-rater feedback assessment activities. Get specific examples from the people involved to reflect the generalizations that are offered by the feedback report.

Beware of Unsolicited Feedback

Be cautious of how you interpret unsolicited feedback provided by others that is delivered by e-mail or by hearsay. Impromptu and unsolicited feedback may be of low quality and may draw heavily on inference. E-mails can be sent impulsively, before the sender has had time to think through whatever is provoking the feedback.

Differentiate feedback from interpretation. You may have good data that accurately describe someone’s behavior, but you don’t know why they are behaving the way they do. Coaching managers stress the importance of keeping an open mind.

The Coachee’s Role

The coachee needs to be an active participant in the coaching process. He or she must keep track of the learning goal, results to date, feedback from others and thoughts about what needs to happen next.

When it comes to learning, the coachee, not the coaching manager, is in the driver’s seat. ●

Providing Balanced and Helpful Feedback

Feedback represents a form of communication, or a message. What should the message include?

Feedback content usually includes a description of the *situation* in which you observed the employee; a description of the *behavior* of, or *actions* taken by, the employee you observed; and a description of the *impact* of the behavior or actions of the employee on others or on a relevant business outcome. “Here is what I saw, and here is what I think was the impact of what I saw” is the basic structure of a feedback message. Note what is included and not included in the message.

Summary: THE COACHING MANAGER

What *is* included is factual information to the highest degree possible.

What *is not* included is an interpretation. If you describe the impact of a particular action or behavior from your vantage point, you're making very few inferences. After all, an individual's manager is a key stakeholder in the actions of that individual. The impact on you, as manager, does count, and the impact you experience from the actions of an employee may be similar to the impact experienced by others. You can therefore state, "This was the impact on me," with real authority.

The Importance of Goals

Always consider the importance of the employee's goals while delivering feedback. If you *focus on what the employee is trying to accomplish or has told you he or she wants to learn*, you have been given license by the employee to be clear and direct.

Feedback is likely to be most useful when it is offered as part of a systematic approach to coaching. A systematic approach means following the steps of creating a coaching friendly context, looking for coaching moments, creating a coaching dialogue, knowing what to look for, providing balanced feedback, collaboratively interpreting the causes for any gap between actual and desired performance and setting some meaningful goals. ●

What Does It All Mean?

Once the coaching manager and the coachee have determined that it is appropriate to search for the root cause or causes for any performance gap, a continuation of the coaching dialogue can help both of them look for those causes. The coaching dialogue encourages the coachee to reflect on the feedback the coaching manager has presented. Provide the feedback, ask the employee for his or her thoughts and wait. See what the employee has to say.

The coaching manager can aid in this process if the coachee is having trouble by using the basic coaching questions: "What were you trying to do?" "What is the impact of what you did?" "What do you need to do differently to have the impact you're hoping for?" Along the way, the coaching manager can encourage the coachee to consider alternatives other than the obvious.

The Importance of 'Getting It Right' When Interpreting Performance

There are times in life when it may be better to do nothing than to do something poorly. This lesson is brought home through a story told by an employee

working with a very effective coaching manager. This young engineer was evidently known for his ability to solve enormously complex problems and explain those problems in lay terms to business people. He was about to give the most important presentation of his young life in front of his own CEO and the leaders of several important customers.

When the time came, he stood up and froze. He was absolutely unable to put his thoughts into words or make sense of his own overheard. The CEO was clearly not pleased but said little. In an effort to end the pain, the young engineer's manager stood up and took over. The manager was very upset after the meeting but held her temper in check. The engineer was shocked and fearful. Clearly they needed to talk.

The manager, who basically trusted the engineer, asked him what was going on. The engineer was at a loss. Finally, the manager asked, "Is something wrong? Is anything bothering you?" The engineer, who was loath to talk about his personal life at work, confided that he'd just put his mother in a nursing home. Perhaps he didn't realize, he said, just how much that had shaken his concentration. The manager expressed confidence in his ability to handle situations like this in the future. Although he was quite anxious in light of this incident, his manager assigned him to do another presentation several weeks later. Once again, his anxiety did detract from his performance, but not nearly so badly. He got through it and covered the necessary material. His manager noted the improvement and predicted a slow but sure recovery. Over time, that is exactly what happened.

Criticism

If the manager had criticized the employee after the original incident, she would have been doing so on the basis of an inference that the cause of the problem was a lack of preparation or even a lack of ability to work with senior managers. Working from such an inference would have undermined her ability to accurately understand the source of the problem. In criticizing the employee, she would also have undermined what little confidence he had left. She would not have helped him develop an awareness of the impact of his personal life on his performance and the need to address work and life stress proactively. Ultimately, she might have lost a great engineer.

Most of us can tolerate criticism when it is directed at a real fault, but to be criticized for not being prepared when, in fact, we are struggling with an overwhelming level of stress can generate long-term resentment. Notice how often you rush to interpret the actions of others

Summary: THE COACHING MANAGER

before finding out the true cause of their actions. To put it another way, *try to precede every conclusion with an open-ended question.* ●

Goal Setting and Follow-Up: Making Change Happen

The most effective learning goals are *specific and measurable, time-bound, challenging, few in number, developed in a participatory fashion and aligned with the goals of the business.* Alignment supports all phases of the learning process (unfreezing, change and refreezing) and supports maximum commitment to the goal.

The coaching dialogue question “What are you going to do differently?” is one way of asking an employee to commit to a particular action or goal

Personal Transformation

Personal transformation that addresses a learning goal involves three steps: unfreezing, change and refreezing.

Unfreezing requires developing a readiness for change. For example, the employee knows he or she needs to change and is ready to begin the work of doing so. Critical feedback delivered by a manager has begun to unfreeze the employee.

In the *change* stage, people are more open to learning. Indeed, they have come to accept that the learning is necessary and are ready to drive the learning themselves. They scan their world for helpful information. They may read about the topic at hand and seek out others who can help them.

Refreezing is making the connection between the new behavior, knowledge or skill and the rest of the employee's life. If the change is not consistent with the rest of the employee's life, refreezing may not occur. Changes must also be consistent with the individual's personality, at least to an extent. Likewise, those in the employee's network of relationships must be able to cope with the employee's newly learned skill or new routine. They may need to change their behavior too.

Be ready to support employees along the way. Access to learning resources, including the opportunity to practice, is a critical aspect of the learning process. Remember, employees may need some encouragement, particularly if the goal is a challenging one. ●

Coaching and Career Development

The following tactics should be helpful to coaching

managers while trying to assist their employees with career development:

- In the coaching dialogue, *from time to time, encourage employees to reflect on what they find satisfying about their work.* Ask them how they feel about what they are doing, where they are and where they want to be.
- *Provide balanced feedback whenever possible in your reaction to the employees' reflection.* Your feedback may include your thoughts about employees' strengths and weaknesses in relation to their career interests; or it may include information about opportunities, or the lack of opportunities, that relate to employees' interests.
- *Whenever possible, encourage employees to build relationships with others who work in areas associated with their career interests.* Facilitate networking opportunities if you can.
- *If possible, use “job-sculpting” tactics to reshape the employee's job in line with his or her career interests when possible.* However, always keep the needs of the business in mind while job sculpting.

Listening

Listening may be the most important intervention the coaching manager can offer. Listening to someone talk about his or her career seems easy on the surface, but this is not always the case. After listening, it is important not to jump into helping. *Encourage the coachee to define a goal or a need and a next step.* You may then provide useful feedback on the basis of your understanding of what the business unit or organization can offer. ●

Developmental Coaching and Performance Problems

At the simplest level, the hallmark of a performance problem is an *ongoing gap* between actual and desired performance, a gap that is not closing and may be worsening. Even the worst performers will be successful on occasion, but for those with performance problems, the gap is there much more often than not. Almost anyone can close a deal sometimes, but organizations need salespeople who can close deals consistently. If someone in a sales role can't sell consistently after he or she has had an opportunity to learn the job, with appropriate support, a performance problem exists.

Addressing Performance Problems

The success of coaching managers rests on their having a helpful attitude, and they need to follow that impulse wherever it takes them. However, they also have their limits, which is a sound insight to keep in mind.

Make sure that the employee with the apparent per-

Summary: THE COACHING MANAGER

formance problem clearly understands what is expected of him or her. View coaching as an experiment. If progress is not forthcoming, consider the possibility that coaching may not be working.

Seek input from others who may have knowledge of the employee and the performance problem. You want to be sure that bias and various perception distortions aren't clouding your assessment.

It may be necessary to alter the balance between self-assessment and feedback. Reflection and self-assessment by the coachee are critical to encouraging employee learning and ownership of the issue at hand.

Follow-up is absolutely essential. When unfreezing is necessary, the employee may need frequent feedback and frequent assessments of the impact of their actions.

Make sure that your coaching offers are aligned with other organizational factors, such as job design, compensation and team functioning. ●

Using Coaching to Leverage the Investment in the Classroom

A series of simple but important practices can help the coaching manager and employee get the most out of an investment in formal classroom education.

First, define the learning goal or goals. Will a classroom experience be helpful? It is likely to be helpful when the employee has to learn new skills or concepts, particularly in a short period of time, or the employee is "stuck," and an educational intervention can address the specific problem that is causing this.

The second practice is choosing the right program. Make sure it is aligned with the employee's learning goals. Also, consider whether or not the content of the program is aligned with the needs and culture of the business unit. If it is not, proactively address any barriers that may make transfer of learning more difficult.

Follow Up

Finally, provide coaching follow-up to the employee on completion of the classroom experience. Immediately after the learner returns from the program, set aside a one- to three-hour block of time during which you and the learner review the content of the program. Discuss what the learner thought, saw and/or felt that might be relevant to his or her performance or the organization.

Either at the end of this meeting or within the next day or two, ask the learner to describe one to three personal learning goals that emerged from his or her experience in the executive education program. Help the

learner define what effective performance would look like if he or she were successful in attaining the goal.

Support the learner by helping to make sure that he or she has meaningful work related to the learning goals the two of you have identified. ●

Coaching and Organizations

The employee's relationship with his or her manager sets the tone for how the employee feels about the work and the organization.

Employees are much more likely to be loyal to the company through the manager. The stronger the personal connection with the manager, the less of a problem, on balance, retention is likely to be. Note that employees choose to remain in such a relationship not just because the manager is charismatic or fun, but because the employee is getting something invaluable from the relationship: learning and growth.

What Should Organizations Do?

An organization should work to create an open and honest culture in which people can talk freely, without fear of reprisals. Encourage people to take manageable risks. Don't punish innovative failures — reward them. Show interest in new ideas. Stay current as a firm. Make sure all levels of management are paying attention to their industry, community and the larger business world. In other words, show that you value learning in general. It is critical for the firm's leadership to make sure that its compensation practices don't actively discourage coaching and learning.

Coaching is a skill. Most managers will need quality training to get a basic sense of what coaching is and how to do it. Most organizations are capable of providing the basic training for their managers. However, as in most adult learning, on-the-job learning is what counts the most. The learning for coaching managers comes from thinking about the specifics of each case: What can I learn from this effort to help this specific employee? ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Coaching Manager*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Enthusiastic Employee*** by David Sirota, Louis A. Mischkind and Michael Irwin Meltzer. Learn the specific management practices that have the greatest impact on employee performance.
2. ***Primal Leadership*** by Daniel Goleman, Annie McKee and Richard E. Boyatzis. Discover how leaders use their Emotional Intelligence (EI) to get results. Learn how the four quadrants of EI impact your style of leadership.
3. ***First, Break All the Rules*** by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. Great managers know that conventional wisdom about human nature doesn't hold up. Learn what great managers do differently.