

Creating a coaching culture

by Dr Mariam Sha

This is by far the most challenging economic period in over two decades. Uncertainty and instability brought about by constant changes, restructuring, working remotely, the pandemic, work mobility, downsizing and mergers, have had an impact on productivity, profit and employee morale.

Money used to buy market share; technology used to bring the competitive advantage. With accessibility and rapid changes, this no longer rings true. What then, is that magic formula that sets businesses apart?

An organisation's people are what can set them apart from competitors. Engaging with employees and unlocking their talent and potential, are important in creating high-performing organisations.

The demands placed on organisational leadership in the new business environment has expanded greatly; talent, skills and leadership have been lost through these changes. In the meantime, those left in charge often do not have the years of experience needed to inform their decision-making.

According to Valerio and Lee (2005), coaching emerged as the preferred "just in time" learning to help leverage the areas that would have the greatest impact on results.

There is much confusion as to what coaching really is and how it differs from counselling and mentoring.

- The general definitions of coaching suggest that a coach works with an individual to unlock potential, focusing on taking individuals from their current state to a positive desired future state. A coach does not need to be a subject-matter expert to coach an individual. It is the technique of questioning, listening, motivating and creating a goal-oriented, enabling thinking environment that is key to the coaching relationship.
- Counselling, from a psychological perspective, addresses historical issues of the past and focuses on understanding and working on how past experiences impact on an individual's current behaviour.
- Mentoring is the transfer of skills from an experienced and skilled individual on a specific subject matter to another requiring this skill.

In South Africa coaching has been introduced in organisations for a number of reasons; retaining talent, refining leadership style, enhancing and supplementing training, and addressing under-performance are among the many outcomes an organisation anticipates from coaching. And what actually transpires as coaching is often a combination of teaching, mentoring, counselling and coaching.

In organisations where it has been introduced as an under-performance improvement measure, coaching as a positive tool is often tainted by negative perceptions, where people shy away from the experience.

When clear and measurable objectives are not set by coach and coachee for the coaching intervention, imprecise outcomes are formed that call the value of coaching into question. In this way and for this reason, some organisations are reluctant in creating a coaching culture.

However, research confirms that coaching taps into the natural way the brain functions, improving and enhancing individual performance. Because of this, coaching is certainly valuable for underperformers, talented individuals or anyone wanting to change behaviour or achieve a goal.

A coaching culture exists when coaching is the predominant style of managing and working together. A commitment to grow the organisation is entrenched in a parallel commitment to grow the people in the organisation. A culture that encourages self-leadership development, contributes to a sense of mutual ownership, allows for exchange of information and knowledge, enables better networking, more effective leadership practices and higher commitment that supports the concept of a learning organisation, creating better results across the organisation.

A coaching culture creates an empowering solution focused work environment. In addition, the move away from instructions and authoritarian styles of management means individuals are respected for their contribution through an ingrained belief that they have the answers to their problems.

Furthermore, research shows that training supported by coaching is significantly more effective than coaching alone. According to a survey by the International Personnel Management Association, the impact of training on productivity is 22.4%, whereas training plus coaching achieves a dramatic 88% increase in productivity. Hence, coaching in the workplace has a positive impact on the bottom line.

The International Coaching Federation (2009) reported that executives who were coached for a minimum of six months experienced a 77% improvement in their working relationships with direct reports; 71% with supervisors; 63% with peers. Additionally, job satisfaction rose 61% and organizational commitment went up 44%.

What to look out for when creating a coaching culture - Mistakes organisations make when creating a coaching culture,

1. Ignoring the bigger picture

An individual does not work in isolation; behaviour is impacted by groups and peers and, in an organisation, cultural norms prevail that can either enable or prevent an individual from implementing change in a positive way. In offering coaching to an individual, an organisation should adopt a holistic approach; individuals being coached cannot change their behaviour if the system does not allow and welcome the change.

2. Setting clear measurable objectives

Neglecting to set individual, team and organisational goals for coaching prior to commencing with a coaching programme leaves little room for specific measurable business objectives, which means coaches and coachees are not working toward

specific outcomes. It is then perceived as coaching adding no values to the organisation.

3. Participation is voluntary

Not every manager has the competencies or perhaps even the desire to be a coach. Coaching is considered a useful skill for all managers to acquire, but in deciding to implement coaching many organisations do not account for those managers who may lack the will or ability to implement it. Workplace coaches should be carefully selected – the sponsor or HR must be totally clear and in agreement with what competencies and behaviours a coach must possess, taking into consideration how these will be acquired and applied to ensure success.

4. Continuation of coaching after training

Training maybe a set towards accreditation for an in-house coach. To embed the learning and change behaviour patterns, ongoing supervision and monitoring is essential to ensure successful implementation of the coaching programme.

5. Failing to monitor and communicate outcomes

The coach may fail to follow through on monitoring and homework – a vital step in the coaching process; as much as it is necessary to set goals at the outset of a coaching programme, it is also equally as necessary to establish a monitoring process. It is also important to review goals and development during each session; many individuals can be quite dismissive of so-called 'soft skills', and in order to overcome this, the coach must clearly communicate the outcome of coaching to job performance.

6. Coaches have all the answers

The explanations and expectations of coaching should be discussed upfront with all stakeholders, and it should be understood that the coach does not have all the answers but has the ability to ask questions that promote a thinking environment that enables the coachee to reflect deeply. If/when a coach responds to pressure from the coachee or the organisation to achieve 'quick' results, the outcome is likely to be superficial rather than a sustained behavioural change. Coaches who succumb to telling and advising are transgressing the principles and spirit of coaching.

Light bulb moment

Coaching is a positive tool for high-performers and under-performers alike. A coaching culture liberates and empowers people to think and it creates an innovative learning organisation. When there is a breakthrough, there is a sense of deep satisfaction and is a confidence booster motivating the coachee to strive for more.

Action Steps

Your first steps to creating a coaching culture

1. Creating a Coaching culture to be a strategic imperative, driven from Executive level.
2. All stakeholder to be included in developing the strategy for a coaching culture.
3. Address the current culture enablers and disabler to a coaching culture.
4. Set objectives for the individual, team and organisation prior to the implementation of the coaching programme.
5. Select coaches on defined competencies.

6. Clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations of all involved.
7. Provide ongoing supervision and support to the coach and coachee.
8. Measure return on investment on the programme.
9. Review, evaluate and improve to ensure sustainability to the culture of the organisation.