Tips for an Effective Coaching Experience

WHY COACHING?

Coaching is a rich learning and development opportunity for all staff, and managers and leaders in particular. It provides a regular space to reflect on their learning and management practice, and to focus on the hard-to-measure goals (like those based on behavior & feeling, rather than quantitative outcomes). To name a few of the benefits of coaching:

* Adult learners learn through an ongoing cycle of reflection, practice, and feedback.
* **Changing behavior is hard.** Many management trainings fail because of a lack of consistent follow up on new learnings.
* **Coaches create accountability** by creating space to reflect on progress to development goals, despite their day to day work.
* **Deep Personal Reflection**. A coach helps to explore the opportunities for and barriers to success on a personal level
* **Experienced perspective.** A coach is an experience manager who can offer concrete advice, based on their own successes and failures.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “COACH”?

The terms “coach” and “mentor” mean different things to different people, and we believe there is no single right approach. One simple distinction lies in the philosophy of the approach:

* the philosophy of coaching is that you are guiding someone to find their own answers without offering your own ideas and suggestions; the solutions lie with them.
* the philosophy of mentorship is that you have valuable experience that you can share that will guide the person you are working with to improve.

Coach and coachee should identify what works best for them, but it may be helpful to operate in the middle ground: the coach will be working to help the coachee identify their own answers and solutions, but will offer helpful stories and advice where helpful.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING STARTED

For the Coachee:

* You should drive the content of the conversations, making sure that you are bringing the challenges and reflections that will most advance your growth as a manager and leader.
* Share your professional & personal development goals with your coach, and regularly reflect on them
* Prepare for the conversation by identifying a challenge you want to discuss or a topic you want to explore (a real-life example is best)
* Be prepared to talk about examples of successes and challenges you’ve experienced in working toward your goal since the last conversation and to explore causes of success and failure
* Make sure you are getting what you need from the relationship – by identifying when something isn’t working for you, or suggesting a change of approach
* Set your coach up for success – be proactive in sharing relevant context and/or giving them windows into your work where helpful and appropriate (i.e. by sharing background documents about the organization, examples of check-in agendas, allowing them to talk to your team where helpful, etc.)
* Not sure what to bring to the call? Consider these prompts:
  + I tried applying x from our last conversation and y happened. I want to think about why that is.
  + I am struggling with this person that I manage, and I can’t figure out what’s behind it . . .
  + I am struggling to apply x lesson from this month’s Fellowship, and I want to talk more about what that could look like. . .
  + This incident occurred this week, and I don’t think I handled it well . . .
  + I tried this and it seemed to really work! I want to celebrate that and think about how I can extend it to other parts of my work/ people I manage. . .
  + I really want to take x to the next level but am not sure how to do so. . .
  + I didn’t take the action we agreed to in our last discussion, and I want to think about what held me back from doing so. . .
  + I had a bit of a breakthrough in x session/ reading y article, and I wanted to explore it more together and what it might mean for my work. . .

For the Coach:

* Through your questions and approach, help your coachee see the connection between their day to day challenges and successes and their larger development goals
* Follow up on commitments the coachee made during the last call
* Take a strengths-based approach by helping coachees to identify and leverage the ways in which their strengths can help them overcome challenges
* Work to build the coachee’s ability to solve their own challenges and find their answers. Sometimes you’ll use guiding questions, and sometimes you’ll need to offer advice or an observation; don’t be afraid to do whichever is needed. Consider informally monitoring “air-time” (who is speaking) to make sure there’s a productive balance on your calls.
* Be encouraging – learning is hard, and this is a journey! Point out progress. Celebrate success.
* Take the conversation where it needs to go – sometimes urgent things will come up that need to be addressed, and it’s okay to focus on those over bigger picture discussions, but wherever possible, help the coachee to link the current challenges to the bigger picture

TIPS FOR YOUR FIRST CONVERSATION

* Get to know each other – share backgrounds, experiences, strengths…
* Explore the working style preferences of the coachee
* Understand what you each would like from the coaching experience and relationship
* Talk about confidentiality: understand what you will and will not share outside of the conversation
* Discuss the individual learning goal(s) the coachee has set for the Fellowship, and discuss why this goals feels important
* Determine how the coach can gather any additional needed context – for example, if the coach should connect with the coachee’s managees, observe a check-in, look at an e-mail or tem agenda, read a past performance review, or take any other steps to more deeply understand the coachee’s needs
* Agree on a Meeting Frequency**:** A good starting place is once a month, for an hour, but adjust up or down according to your need.
* Determine whether coachee would like to send any written reflections or next steps from each conversation or do any preparation for future conversations and send follow-up notes