

Creating a CULTURE OF COACHING in Organizations

BY RICHARD E. BOYATZIS, MELVIN L. SMITH, AND ELLEN B. VAN OOSTEN

When Jeff Darner, senior director of talent management and human resources, first brought coaching into Moen, a Fortune Brands company, he faced a grindingly slow process.

As he said, the executives “were not used to asking people about how they feel.” What’s more, Moen’s managers already felt pressed for time to complete their daily work and saw developmental conversations as another task on their already lengthy lists. Little by little, through training and conversations, the climate changed. Managers who once felt they didn’t have time to talk—much less listen—to each other now take the time to do just that. They even report observable daily, informal coaching moments among managers and with staff members in the halls and after meetings.

That’s the kind of coaching culture we are helping to create in the organizations in which we work. Specifically, an effective coaching culture develops in organizations where people have gained skills in helping other people through coaching to their dreams and visions of the future.

BRINGING COACHING TO WORK ORGANIZATIONS

Coaching is still relatively new to organizations. They are still exploring the many forms of coaching and finding ways to perfect it. One thing we’ve learned, however, is that the coaching relationship is key, especially when we consider that organizations are in need of resonant leaders who can motivate and engage others. One of us, Ellen, in a study of senior financial leaders in a leadership development

program with coaching, found support for the importance of a coaching relationship. Her study revealed that a high-quality coaching relationship had a direct, positive impact on the leader’s work engagement, career satisfaction, and expression of a personal leadership vision.¹

We also know that coaching can elevate the professional prospects of certain special and at-risk groups in organizations, such as emerging leaders, minority groups, and women. For example, we know that in the United States, women in organizations don’t receive coaching as much or as often as do men. Yet women “face distinct individual and organizational realities” that coaching could help them address, according to our friends and colleagues Margaret (Miggy) Hopkins, professor at the University of Toledo, and Deborah O’Neil, professor at Bowling Green State University. In one of our many discussions with Miggy and Deb, they noted that women remain underrepresented in leadership roles and are underpaid as a group. Coaching therefore could provide professional women with a safe place to contend with issues like career advancement in male-dominated fields and to reflect on work-life integration. Researchers also recommend coaching for helping both women and minorities find their unique voice and advance through organizational structures.

But providing coaching isn’t always easy, especially at first, as Jeff Darner found when he introduced coaching at Moen.



And it can also be challenging even long after coaching has been introduced in an organization, as Niloofar Ghods discovered when she became leader of Cisco Systems' coaching practice. She walked into the job looking forward to providing a variety of development options for thousands of Cisco's executives and professionals. Little did she know that her first task would be taking stock of the deluge of coaching configurations already in place. Cisco was spending millions on coaching but could account for only a small percentage of the coaches being used by the company and its people. As Niloofar described it, "I had to clean house."²

We've heard the same story from many learning and development executives of Fortune 500 companies. Like Niloofar, they find they must begin by surveying and documenting how much coaching is being delivered and by whom. At that point, they review the best ways for people to have access to coaches. Moreover, ensuring consistent coaching quality and managing fees presents a major challenge, something Niloofar addressed by creating a training and certification process for all coaches Cisco uses, both internal and external.

But other organizations face development challenges that are far more complex than accounting for and providing the best coaching. Amy Grubb coordinates staff development (which sometimes includes coaching) for 25,000 people at the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Adding to the pressure of the job itself, FBI leaders are in the public spotlight daily. They have to present a veneer of calm and perfection while somehow juggling the demands of truth, justice, and partisan

politics. Although the FBI uses coaches automatically when onboarding a new executive or transitioning someone to a new job, Amy also created a program where a leader can request a coach as needed. When the federal budget became tighter, however, she began to encourage more "self-coaching" through mindfulness exercises.³

As these examples illustrate, creating an effective coaching culture requires a range of management skills and thoughtful discernment—everything from assessing overall need and managing access to coaches, to (sometimes) centralizing coach training and certification to ensure quality. We also see in these examples three basic approaches to offering coaching services in organizations: (1) encourage and train associates to peer coach in pairs or teams; (2) provide access to internal or external coaches (people professionally trained as coaches and typically certified by some professional group); and/or (3) educate and develop managers and senior leaders to provide coaching to their direct reports and others.

PEER COACHING

One approach used to craft a culture of coaching in organizations is peer coaching. Peer coaching formalizes a personal, supportive connection for mutual help. The idea is for two or more people of relatively equal status to come together to help each other with personal and professional development, using a reflective process often involving recalling meaningful incidents or stand-out moments. Our colleagues Kathy Kram, Ilene Wasserman, Polly Parker,

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and Tim Hall describe the process of helping as dynamic and the main purpose of peer coaching “to promote goal-directed mutual learning with clear boundaries.”⁴ Reviewing specific events from work appears most helpful when the people involved see each of the events as a kind of living case study. So, one person selects an event of relative importance from work, presents it to the other individual or group, and together they brainstorm about how it went and what other options might have been available. This mode of review has been seen as more valuable when it involves peers talking to and helping one another, as opposed to peers being guided by an expert or “superior,” which can feel like another level of the “ought” self being imposed, which then stimulates a stress response.

One of the most successful peer-coaching groups to help people change their behavior is Alcoholics Anonymous.⁵ It was the peer aspect—people stripped of formal status differences and talking as equals—that gave AA credibility. It enabled people to approach one of the most difficult behaviors to change, an addiction habit, with a sense of possibility. The members of a meeting, as they are called, come to rely on each other for support, insight, inspiration, and comfort. Knowing that they have each “been there” makes the discussions believable and honest and the shared experience creates strong bonds between members.

Peer coaching can be formal or informal and can involve people from within and outside of the organization. These relationships often sustain themselves over long periods of time because the people develop deep, resonant

relationships involving mutual caring and compassion, shared vision and purpose, and an upbeat, helpful mood.

Best of all, from an organizational standpoint at least, peer coaching offers a low-cost alternative for providing support to large numbers of managers and employees, and can lead to a very positive cultural norm. In particular, peer coaching provides a great way for organizations to practice coaching on a daily basis and to cascade it down from managers to employees.

USING INTERNAL AND/OR EXTERNAL COACHES

Another approach to building a culture of coaching is to utilize internal and/or external coaches. Organizations looking to hire coaches first must decide whom to hire externally or internally, and sometimes companies choose to do both.⁶ The internal option might begin with an internal training program on how to develop a coach approach in developmental conversations with others. Many begin by providing coach education for managers to help them build their coaching capabilities. The most prevalent groups that provide coach education and training are universities and training companies. Programs offered by such organizations acknowledge a person has acquired knowledge and learned a particular model and techniques to help the individual coach more effectively. An important step is to vet the program and providers to be sure the experience and instructors are properly credentialed and the experience is high quality.



The second group comprises associations or companies that “certify” that the person is a credible coach. This is a certification based on their group’s competency model. Currently, the largest of these are the International Coach Federation (ICF), WABC (Worldwide Association of Business Coaches), and CCE (the Center for Credentialing and Education). The awkward issue is that there are no published studies showing which competencies or characteristics of particular coaches enable them to be more effective than others. That is, these associations and companies offer certification without any empirical evidence that their models actually work. Their research takes the form of attitude or opinion surveys.

Perhaps the best method is to look for converging evidence from personal referrals, formal education, and certification in a variety of approaches. Using such methods to maximize quality of the coaches hired can help people seeking coaches to understand they are getting the best possible development.

Internal coaches may also help when there’s a unique circumstance that might take time to understand. For example, when the Cleveland Clinic, ranked as the No. 2 hospital in the United States, wanted to develop more of its physician leaders as general managers, it turned primarily to a cadre of internal coaches. The clinic, which was one of the largest U.S. hospitals, had developed a highly effective patient-experience program that changed the culture. Meantime, it was acquiring other hospitals rapidly in other cities and countries. While each of these aspects of the

Cleveland Clinic was not unique, the combination created a situation that few professional coaches had encountered. The aggressive program of using coaches helped develop doctors, nurses, and staff as effective leaders.

DEVELOPING MANAGERS TO BE COACHES

The approach of developing managers to also be coaches is not new. In the early 1970s, senior executives at Monsanto who worked in what we now call learning and development, asked coaching pioneer Walt Mahler to offer courses in coaching skills to selected executives.⁷ In the decades since then, learning and development staff at many organizations have tried to promote this coaching aspect of the manager’s role more and more—primarily because managers themselves have become more focused on development as a reason to remain in a firm. In other words, managers, research has shown, wish to grow and advance through developing people in their organizations and have found that coaching is an effective way to do it.

Of course, to ask managers to add coaching to their daily efforts means that they will need some training in why coaching is important in the first place and how to acquire both a coaching perspective and the skills required. The skills for developing others, however, are not the same as typical management capabilities. One study showed how training managers in coaching skills improved sales of their entire teams.⁸ Without such training, managers are likely to fall back on their personal views of others—biases that may be as basic as a belief that people can’t change—which could

interfere with how well they come across to others as caring and interested in others' development.⁹

This even can help in hospitals and health care. Dr. Patrick Runnels is not only a psychiatrist but also runs a fellowship program for doctors finishing their residency in psychiatry and working in community mental health sites. In a development program with coaching in which he was a participant, he experienced and practiced coaching with compassion. "It hadn't dawned on me that when giving feedback in supervisory settings," he said, "you can use coaching with compassion to reach more people." He was trying to prepare MDs who would be managing treatment teams to take a growth mindset and try to frame their work as not managing tasks but motivating people. During the program he was running for the fellows, he asked each to develop his or her personal vision. He had them practice coaching each other and then discuss it with peers, using coaching as a regular part of their supervision (or management) of others in the hospital. Participants said coaching with compassion made a lot of sense and it was much more fun than typical ways people handle motivating others. Their reactions were, in his words, "amazing." Even though they were psychiatrists, he said, "Two-thirds had never thought of motivating others through the [positive emotional attractor]." Now many of the fellows have put these methods into practice.

The larger strategic image is that if a critical mass of managers saw coaching as part of their day-to-day role—and did it—coaching would become a new norm rather than just an occasional practice. It could change an organization's culture to one that is more developmental and compassionate (i.e., caring), which seems more in tune with the largest group of employees in the emerging workforce, the Millennials. According to international surveys, not only are Millennials demographically as large if not larger than the Baby Boomers were; they are also more purpose driven and they seek development in their work.¹⁰

If managers and executives viewed coaching as part of their style—that is, their personal way of acting in their role—this would also contribute to a shift in an organization's culture. Seeing coaching as part of your role instills an expectation

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that each leader should be coaching and helping others. When you change what people see as the rules of the game, how a person should act, and what they should value, you have changed the culture!

As authors, our hope and our vision are that as people begin to learn to coach each other with compassion, they soon will start trying the same approach in their work units as well as in their families, with friends and acquaintances. Organizations will see the benefits daily, as will the people within them.

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¹ E. Van Oosten, "The Impact of Emotional Intelligence and Executive Coaching on Leader Effectiveness." Unpublished doctoral dissertation (2013), Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio.

² Quotes from statements made in "Coaching in Organizations: Today's Reality and Future Directions," panel discussion at the Thirteenth Annual Leading Edge Consortium conference on coaching, Minneapolis, October 20–21, 2017.

³ Comments from "Coaching in Organizations."

⁴ P. Parker et al., "Peer Coaching at Work: Principles and Practices" (Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books, 2018).

⁵ Bill W., "My First 40 Years: An Autobiography by the Cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous" (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2000).

⁶ R. Jones, S. Woods, and Y. Guillaume, "The Effectiveness of Workplace Coaching: A Meta-Analysis of Learning and Performance Outcomes from Coaching," *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 89 (2015): 249–277, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/joop.12119>.

⁷ W. Mahler, "Although Good Coaching Is Basic to Managerial Productivity, Most Organizations Have Difficulty Getting Their Managers to Be Effective Coaches," *Personnel Administration* 27, no. 1 (1964): 28–33.

⁸ J. J. Dhaling et al. "Does Coaching Matter? A Multilevel Model Linking Managerial Coaching Skill and Frequency to Sales Goal Attainment," *Personnel Psychology* 69 (2016): 863–894.

⁹ P. A. Hestlin, D. Vandewalle, and G. P. Latham, "Keen to Help? Managers' Implicit Person Theories and Their Subsequent Employee Coaching," *Personnel Psychology* 59, no. 4 (2006): 871–902, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2006.00057.x>.

¹⁰ Among sources of primary data on millennials, Manpower's "2016 Millennial Careers: 2020 Vision," surveying 19,000 millennials from 25 countries; and American Express/Kantar Futures, 2017, "Redefining the C-Suite: Business the Millennial Way, 2017," which surveyed 1,363 millennials from the US, UK, France, and Germany.