

# Managers Rebooted: Creating a Coaching Culture

THOUGHT PAPER

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In our years of studying and working with companies as coaching partners, we have observed a stark dichotomy – while they are increasingly investing in external coaching for their senior leadership, they are reluctant to build a culture of coaching across the organization to help each employee realize their full potential.

Somewhere in between top leaders full of enlightened ideas and employees hungry for enlightened practices exist a whole layer of managers who continue to operate the way they always have - as one who tell employees exactly what needs to be done and how it should be done. Though useful in some situations, this command and control type of functioning is not tenable for a business environment defined by constant and disruptive change. This has never been highlighted more than in the current challenges organizations and employees are going through.

To maximize individual and organizational performance, managers need to unlock employee potential so that they unearth their talents, instead of being told what to do. For this, managers need to guide and not instruct, probe, and not impose. In short, they need to reboot themselves to the role of a coach.

Coaching is a powerful tool that can be utilized at every stage of a Manager – Employee interaction. It is through this model of ‘manager-as-a-coach,’ which is ongoing and executed by those inside the organization, can companies establish a coaching culture that percolates all the way down. Let’s look at some of the most critical areas for managers to step up as a coach:

### Coaching in Setting Goals

People often fail to achieve desired results because of a lack of clarity about their goals and expectations about when they can be achieved. Through coaching conversations, managers can help their team members identify what they want to and can (with a little stretch!) accomplish. As a coach, the manager does not establish goals for his team but sits with them to facilitate clear thinking about their personal objectives – in addition to the objective of the organization or that of the project. **By asking open-ended questions like "What do you hope to achieve from this conversation?" or "Where do you see yourself three months from now?" or "What do you hope to achieve this month?", managers can open up a safe space for employees to speak up and create a high-quality connection.** The role of the manager here is to prompt employees into deeper thinking, weigh their options, and articulate their own goals-basically to raise questions and step aside.

### Coaching in Evaluations

Citing reasons like “too busy” or “the people are not coachable”, most managers tackle performance evaluations as events where they tell people what they did wrong, what they want them to do to fix it, and the timeframe to better their performance. Employees on the other hand feel like victims of manager’s biases, feeling chastised and completely in clouds about the next steps. By taking the time to coach, managers can use evaluations to teach people and help them grow. **With active listening and by setting aside prior knowledge about employees, managers can encourage people to lower their guards and discuss their sentiments openly.** As managers use an exploratory tone (as opposed to an authoritative one), and practice advance listening they can help employees gain insight into what happened and how they can handle it better next time. In this way, employees take ownership of their performance and a deep sense of mutual trust and respect gets established between the two parties. **With a shift away from a “do as I say” attitude, managers and team members can collaboratively think of on the job training opportunities which gives employees a chance to improve and demonstrate their skills.** The end goal here is not to just find an “easy fix” for skill deficiencies, but to create an environment where employees strive to perform at a high level.

### Coaching in Feedback

Coaching based feedbacks are supportive two-way dialogues meant to turn confusions and errors into earnest conversations. **Such feedback is given in real-time in engaging year-round conversations and not only during annual reviews.** The key question manager coaches need to ask themselves before giving coaching feedback is **“What response from me will motivate this person and help them bring forth all their expertise?”** Yes, a coach manager needs to give specific feedback about observed actions, **however, in many cases the answer is to maintain silence and just listen!** During the course of informal conversations, managers can **encourage critical thinking**, letting employees get to the root cause of the problem themselves and come up with diverse solutions. By giving people a chance to talk first, managers can elicit a pattern of self-search, giving team members a sense of control over the situation. By sincerely appreciating and recognizing good work, managers can boost self-confidence while encouraging others to aspire towards the same level of performance.

## Coaching in Problem-Solving

The first instinct of a manager when a teammate comes to them with a problem or a conflict is to give them advice about what to do. Yes, the problem gets solved; but only in the short term. Faced with a similar problem in the future, the teammate would not know how to solve it on his/her own. By using phrases like **“I completely get where you are coming from” or “What I hear you saying is”**, managers can **acknowledge and validate their teammates' problems while helping them move past them.** Very often, hearing someone else relay the problem out aloud can inspire answers people have been searching for. **Manager coaches can give team members a peek into the neural network which can help them solve their problem, instead of giving a ready-made solution.**

A culture of coaching is based on the belief that engaging employees in the process of understanding a problem and encouraging independent thinking to reach creative solutions, makes employees and resultantly the organization stronger. The pre-requisites for this are:

1. **Voice of the leadership:** Managers are likely to roll their eyes if they perceive coaching as the latest 'HR fad'. They would do the minimum to comply with the requirements, not making any serious efforts towards establishing a coaching culture. Commitment and support of top leadership in the form of addressing the topic in meetings and conclaves, clearly stating the value of coaching to the organization, and by modeling a coaching behavior, can make managers notice that it is high on the priority list.
2. **Integration with onboarding:** When integrated at the stage of onboarding, managers can coach new recruits towards a growth mindset, inculcating in them a belief that they are capable of honing their existing abilities to take on new challenges. Such positive reinforcement can prime new employees to be more persistent, adaptable, and aspire towards high performance.
3. **Sharing success stories:** For coaching to become a 'culture', a great way is to communicate success stories across the organization. People get motivated and adoption becomes easy when they see real life examples of success stories and role models.

## Rooting for the cause of coaching

[Studies](#) prove that organizations with a strong coaching culture have a larger percentage of engaged employees and higher revenue growth as compared to their peers. With 70% employee learning and development

happening on the job, a coaching culture embedded in the fabric of an organization can be created when managers reinvent themselves as coaches who coach not only when something goes wrong but on a regular basis to empower employees.

## About the Author



**Mainak** brings over 24 years of experience spanning business and HR roles across geographies. This has given him a unique understanding of the link between HR and business strategy. He also holds a patent for HR capability development.

Mainak's experience includes human capital strategy, culture, talent development (performance, leadership development, career pathing, competency, learning, engagement, diversity) and talent acquisition (including on-boarding and background check). He has also implemented HRIS platform and HR metrics to improve performance.

Recently he has been helping start-ups set up efficient and effective HR teams and processes. In addition, Mainak is a recognized Executive Coach and Leadership Development expert.

Mainak's previous work experience includes stints/projects with Accenture (Consulting and HR), Hewitt Associates, AbsolutData, Heidrick & Struggles, Evalueserve, Sterlite Technologies and Upstox.

Mainak holds a MBA from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and is a certified executive coach.

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