



What coaching is and how it works

Although the use of the term 'performance coaching' is a relatively new development over the last 20 years, there is nothing new about the skills themselves and they can be identified as far back as in the writings of Socrates, who said;

'I cannot teach anybody anything; I can only make them think'.

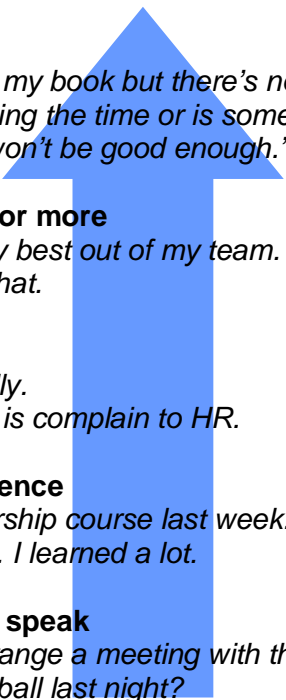
Performance coaching (which expression includes life, career, fitness, business, executive, finance and any other category of coaching in the modern sense of the word) is about communicating in a way that enhances understanding, clarity, awareness, responsibility, self belief and productive relationships.

The essential coaching skills are:

- **Active listening**
- **Questions which enhance self directed learning**
- **Clarifying**
- **Goal setting**
- **Shifting perspective**
- **Holding the coachee accountable**
- **Effective feedback**
- **Creating trust and empathy**

For the purposes of this article, the term 'coachee' applies to a client, direct report, team member or anyone else who may be on the receiving end of coaching skills, whether in a formal coaching session, informally in the workplace or elsewhere.

The five levels of listening

- 
- 5 Intuitive listening**
 - *I really want to write my book but there's never any time*
 - *Is this about not having the time or is something else getting in the way?*
 - *I'm afraid my book won't be good enough."*
 - 4 Listening and asking for more**
 - *I want to get the very best out of my team.*
 - *tell me more about that.*
 - 3 Giving advice**
 - *My manager is a bully.*
 - *What you should do is complain to HR.*
 - 2 Giving our own experience**
 - *I went on the Leadership course last week.*
 - *I went on it last year. I learned a lot.*
 - 1 Waiting for our turn to speak**
 - *I think we should arrange a meeting with the stakeholders first.*
 - *Did you see the football last night?*

In coaching, we listen at **Levels 4 and 5** all the time and remain always on the other person's agenda.

Do you know people who listen at **Levels 1, 2 and 3**? How does it make you feel? Do you sometimes do this yourself? People who listen like this are following their own agenda.

It is a luxury to be listened to at **Level 4**. The listener is on the speaker's agenda for the first time.

At **Level 5** there is a lot more going on. The listener is listening intuitively by:

- enabling the speaker to explore the situation;
- offering his or her own take by highlighting the speaker's apparent leadership qualities;
- offering a suggestion.

Intuitive listening means putting yourself in other persons' shoes, listening behind the words and between the words, listening to silences, body language and other signals. It also means focusing on their best potential and believing that they are capable and confident rather than criticising or doubting them.

The difference between giving advice in **Level 3** and offering a suggestion in **Level 5** is that the listener asked permission the second time. This is a good way of creating trust and rapport; there is more information on this under the Heading 'Permission' later in this Section.

There are times and places for Levels 2 and 3 – giving advice and sharing your own experience can be valuable in managing your staff - but these levels do not qualify

as *listening*. Your own intuition is your best guide for knowing which technique will help in any given situation.

Questioning and clarifying

In normal conversation, when we ask questions it is in order to gain information, either for our own benefit or to help us to make judgements, arrive at decisions, or to give advice. However, when a coach asks a question, it is so that *the coachee may gain information about him or herself*.

A coach will ask open questions to turn the coachee's focus inwards, enabling the coachee to gain new awareness and to uncover new insights. In this way, coaching unpeels layer after layer until the coachee reaches a core of new understanding. Once this core is reached, the coachee is catapulted into action and the coach asks some closed questions, channelling the new energy into tangible steps.

This process is accelerated by clarifying on the part of the coach, either repeating the coachee's words back in a different form, or mirroring back the exact words. Each clarification acts like an affirmation for the coachee, making them feel as if they have been heard, that what they have said is worth hearing, and that they can now move on.

Goals, actions, perspective and accountability

Coaches facilitate their coachees to set challenging, measurable goals which will stretch and inspire them, then ensure that dreams and aspirations are supported by a framework of strategies and actions to move coachees forward step by step, encouraging the exploration of new perspectives and ideas.

Accountability arises through checking on a regular basis, in a supportive and non-judgemental way, to see that the framework is in place and the actions are being achieved.

Feedback

Most of us have a tendency to be our own worst critic. In addition to this, not many of us receive as much appreciation from others as we feel we deserve. The 'no news is good news' principle holds firm in many workplaces. A coaching approach can help by highlighting the coachee's achievements wherever possible, raising motivation, self esteem and confidence. Good coaches also offer their own insights as feedback, challenging the coachee to step outside their self imposed limitations.

Creating trust and empathy

Without these elements, the coachee will not open up and no coaching will take place. Some of the rules which need to be in place are:

- Confidentiality
- No conflict of interest: this can arise if, say, a manager is coaching a direct report in formal sessions
- Letting the coachee know what is expected of them and what to expect of the coach
- Keeping promises: the coach must do what they said they would do and adhere to schedules.

Conclusion

Coaching is not appropriate for every situation – there are times where direct instruction and advice are required. However, coaching skills can make the workplace a happier and more productive environment whether used informally in management, meetings and peer communication, or formally in structured coaching sessions.

About the author:

International speaker, writer and broadcaster Carol Wilson is Managing Director of Performance Coach Training in partnership with Sir John Whitmore, Europe's pioneer of coaching, and on the Executive Committee at Performance Consultants International. Carol experienced the value of a coaching culture at first hand when she worked at board level with Sir Richard Branson in the formative years of Virgin. She became the first woman in the world to found a successful record company, the first woman director of global corporate Polygram and is now Honorary Vice President and Head of Accreditation at the Association for Coaching.

Carol was nominated for the AC Awards 'Influence in Coaching' and 'Impact in Coaching' and is the author of 'Best Practice in Performance Coaching' to be published by Kogan Page in Autumn 2007 and featuring Forewords by Sir John Whitmore and Sir Richard Branson.

Contact:

+44(0)1932 702657

info@performancecoachtraining.com

www.performancecoachtraining.com

Further information:

Further information and articles about coaching are available from carolwilson@coachingatwork.net by request.

The Association for Coaching (www.associationforcoaching.com) and the CIPD (www.cipd.com) both carry useful coaching articles and surveys on their websites.

Recommended booklist:

Tim Gallwey: *The Inner Game of Tennis*
Sir John Whitmore: *Coaching For Performance*
Richard Barratt: *Liberating The Corporate Soul*
Ken Blanchard: *The One Minute Manager*
Stephen Lundin: *Fish*

About the author:

Professional speaker, writer and broadcaster Carol Wilson is Head of Accreditation and Honorary Vice President at the Association for Coaching. She experienced the value of a coaching culture at first hand while working at board level with Richard Branson at Virgin and became the first woman in the world to found a successful record company. Carol is now MD of Culture at Work and Coaching Group Director for Sir John Whitmore's Performance Consultants International, advising and implementing strategies for organisations to transform their cultures. She is currently working with Brunel University on coaching modules for their MBA students and other clients include Royal Bank of Scotland Leadership Summit, Department for Education & Skills, Cranfield University Business School, Dubai Oil & Gas, Showtime TV and MTV. Carol was nominated for the AC Awards 'Influence in Coaching' and 'Impact in Coaching' and is the author of 'All About Performance Coaching'.

Contact:

Direct line: 01932 702657
Head office: 020 7927 6782

carolwilson@cultureatwork.net
www.cultureatwork.net