

COACHING WITH POISE

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how to improve the way face to face coaching sessions are conducted. Alternative coaching applications are presented and a tighter definition of coaching provides the context for a five-step coaching protocol to use at each coaching conference. The method incorporates a set of underlying principles and practices that taken together, are recommended ways to handle the challenges of business coaching.

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A PREFERENCE FOR COACHING

A recent study of major corporations that use executive coaching found their human resources professionals are increasingly incorporating coaching into their leadership development programs. In the same study, coaching was ranked fourth most important out of seventeen by executives' ranking of various kinds of development methods. The Economist (2002) estimated that executive coaching is growing at about 40% per year. From 1998 to 2001 the number of professional coaches grew from 5,300 to about 10,000 (Oechsli, 2004). It would appear that coaching has become one of the major tools for management and leadership development, even though it has been part of the management tool kit for thirty years. Only now has it come of age as a development tool, as a way to accelerate organizational learning, and as an acceptable idea for executives to have a "personal coach" (Corporate Executive Board, 2003).

While its importance is certainly growing, coaching is not seen as producing the kind of results one would expect of a tightly focused, tailored, goal-oriented process that may cost on the average \$25,000 per executive. The Corporate Executive Board study concluded that even with the growing excitement and indeed *preference* for executive coaching, there are five major challenges to be addressed:

1. **Difficulty Finding the "Best Fit" Professional Coaches** – Organizations cannot identify suitable coaches due to poor ways coaches are recruited.
2. **Unfocused Coaching Engagements** – Coaching is offered on the basis of individual requests not business needs.
3. **Poor Matching Of Coach To Executive** – Organizations are unable to find the right experience and personalities among available coaches.
4. **Disconnection From The Organization** – Little on-going impact from coaching occurs because coaching is done "behind closed doors", missing business needs.
5. **Inconsistent Delivery and Quality of the Coaching.** – Wide variety of styles and approaches prevent consistent performance coaching standards from being implemented across organizations.

This article tackles the fifth challenge – quality. Our premise is that by applying similar principles, practices and standards of the traditional professional disciplines to coaching, the entire process can be improved and its impact heightened. This, in turn, should lead to better results and return of investment.

Before proceeding, a note of clarification is needed. Coaches can be found in any function and at all organizational levels; employees, managers, or even senior executives can be the object of the coaching. Non-managerial employees, supervisors and managers are usually coached by internal coaches, either their immediate manager or a professional from human resources. Senior managers, however, are more likely to have *external* “executive coaches.” For the sake of clarity, throughout this article the term “employee” will refer to all managers and non-managerial persons unless otherwise noted, and the principles and practices of coaching discussed below are assumed to be useful for any type of internal or external coach, coaching any kind of employee on any issue or performance problem.

COACHING APPLICATIONS FRAMEWORK.

Professional coaches may or may not act in a professional way, as a number of sports coaches have demonstrated over the last few years. Nevertheless, people usually think of sports events when they think about coaching. They visualize the coach slapping backs, having private side conversations, yelling at players, or debating a referee. All of those behaviors are coaching activities, but they are of *one* similar kind, what is called “immediate, just-in time-coaching.” Figure 1 shows, coaching on two dimensions: Time (Immediate to Extended) and Focus (Positive to Developmental). From this it is possible to construct a framework of four kinds of coaching opportunities along the *time* and *focus* dimensions.

[INSERT FIG. 1 ABOUT HERE]

Coaching Alternatives Matrix. Professionalizing coaching requires being able to diagnose the coaching *need* so that the right “treatment” can be applied. Figure 1 provides a way to think about what kind of coaching is needed as well as the range of skills and behavioral flexibility required in professional application. Coaching at any organizational level may fall into anyone of the quadrants. At the (I) end of the continuum coaching is in the moment and “just in time” as the coach points a finger to a player to tell her where to go on the court. On the other hand, (E) coaching is formal, planned, and scheduled to deal with, for example, a manager’s performance issues that may be either exemplary or a problem.

Both (E) and (I) coaching always have two foci alternatives where the coaching may offer *developmental* (D) help to correct, redirect, guide, or prevent something negative from happening, or provide *positive* (P) feedback that encourages, motivates, reinforces or persuades someone to continue doing something.

The combination of *Extended* (E) / *Positive* (P) is used when the coach gives formal positive feedback for exceeding expectations, etc. It is also the quadrant which treats the regular performance review as a coaching opportunity. The combination of *Extended* (D) / *Developmental* (D) is used when formal, developmental (or corrective) coaching is needed. Most executive coaching falls into this quadrant. It is also the combination used for serious and continuing performance problems, or, for example, when an employee has violated company policy.

Professional Coaching in Practice. All professionals share five basic characteristics. They: 1) focus on defined outcomes; 2) share a body of knowledge; 3) have essential competencies; 4) abide by ethical standards; and 5) have clear roles (Ulrich, 1997). As the practice of management has become more professional, so the art and science of

coaching can be seen both contributing to that standard, and having its own set of professional characteristics.

Broadly speaking, the outcomes of coaching are individual and organizational health. The body of knowledge needed to coach ranges from personal psychology, interpersonal communication, and group dynamics to the complexities of business and organizational development. Coaching competencies include relationship building, consultation, psychometric interpretation, interviewing and management. All coaches abide by a strict code of ethics including confidentiality, objectivity, honesty and guidance that is always legal. Finally, coaches have clear roles any of which can be included in a coaching contract. Roles include teacher, confidant, enquirer, analyst, and consultant.

DEFINING COACHING

Coaching has been defined as fostering self-awareness and motivation to change (Dotlich & Cairo, (1999); transformational (Harrison, 1999); teaching, mentoring and providing guidance (Cook, 1999); functionally as counseling, mentoring, and tutoring (Kinlaw, 1989); behavior modification (Fournies, 1987); providing feedback, using techniques and effective questioning (Landsberg, 1996); providing guidance and critique, support and nurturing (Maister, 1997); and as a facilitative one-to-one, mutually designed relationship (Mitsch 2002). From my own experience, I would define coaching as follows:

Coaching is a process that uses dialogic skills and diagnostic tools to facilitate learning in the personal and professional capabilities of employees, by resolving differences between current and future role requirements, and the employee's existing competencies.

In the broadest sense, the goals of coaching are to help employees to: 1) build and enhance self-directedness so people can act with greater autonomy, effectiveness, confidence, and business acumen; 2) learn to trust their own judgment; 3) mobilize personal, continuous

improvement with a conviction that change is both possible and desirable; and 4) enable a faster, bigger, better, cheaper organization to be produced (Knowles, 1980; Lencioni, 2002; Ulrich, 1997; Verlander, 1999). Coaching goals may be quite broad and strategic, or very specific, such as helping a manager to listen better or facilitate team meetings.

Learning Needs Employee's learning needs may be *professional* in the sense of having to do with technical (functional) role requirements, career advancement, performance objectives or special task skills. Or, they may be *personal* needs such as behavioral, cognitive, and emotional development having to do with how employees work with people and achieve results (Goleman, 1998, 2000). Based on actual coaching experience, the range of coaching goals and learning needs varies considerably by level and differs for managerial and non-managerial employees. However, a common need where coaching can be especially useful is helping employees and leaders reconcile paradoxical organizational issues and dilemmatic decisions (Dotlich & Cairo, 1999).

A relatively new application of management coaching is merger and acquisition "transition coaching" for managers moving from one company to another and who need to adjust rapidly to the acquiring company's culture and expectations (Corporate Executive Board, 2003). Table 1 provides a perspective on the kinds of coaching issues that can arise for various kinds of employees.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Coaching Methods. Coaches primarily use discussion to diagnose, analyze and deal with problems and issues produced by some form of data gathering (e.g., personality questionnaires, learning style inventories, stress tests, interviewing colleagues, and 360-feedback surveys). Other methods include: video taping, trial practice, reading, behavioral reminders, role plays, scenarios, drills, and case studies. The purpose of any method, tool or

technique is to help employees gain personal insight, learn new skills, develop new habits and generally become more effective in their current role, which in turn should improve how the organization functions. In other words, it is expected that business coaching will be applied by the employee in the resolution of current problems and future organizational requirements.

Coaching Skills and Competencies. Coaching has its own set of values, competencies and skills. The return on investment from coaching can be much higher if the coach shifts from what Evered and Selman, (1989) call “COP” or Control-Order-Prescription to “ACE”, Achieve-Create-Empower. They argue that a new coaching paradigm is needed that embraces learning and development rather than just compliance. Such a paradigm calls for new skills, coaching principles and practices, and a coaching model with a professional process -- one that is standardized yet able to deal with the widest range of learning needs and organizational problems.

Coaching Models. Traditionally, coaching models have been described as requiring two basic processes: 1) a logical “decision tree analysis” to determine if coaching is needed, and if so, in what areas of knowledge, skill or behavior; and 2) a rational problem solving process that produces a practical solution usually involving changes in employees’ behavior (Fournies, 1987). A low return on investment reported by recent studies may be the result of this rather limited way of thinking about coaching that is strictly behavioral, reductionist, analytical and linear.

Insufficient attention has been given to cognitive and contextual coaching. By this we mean coaching that systemically accommodates logical rational analysis *and* cognition, or the thinking process of an employee. In other words, effective coaching requires “systems thinking” that helps, for example, a manager to see 1) how existing theories, mental models and automatic ways of thinking have built the person’s perspective on “managing”, in 2) the context of the manager’s impact, role, level, function and current business conditions, that 3)

for some reason is now causing a problem in the way the person manages. Systems thinking can also yield an existential understanding of the coaching *as it is occurring* to which the coach can refer if beneficial to do so (Senge, 1990). This understanding is crucial to developing the employee's awareness of and commitment to change, that analytical thinking cannot do on its own. A simple example would be discussing how well the employee handles receiving critical feedback when being coached, which may reflect how poorly the employee communicates with direct reports and colleagues at work. The coach ties the relationship of the two together so the employee immediately sees how the employee's current thinking and behavior impact the coaching process *and* relationships back on the job. Related intentions, habits, assumptions and thought processes then become the issues to be examined.

To embrace the complexities of behavioral impact, cognition, and contextual - analytical thinking, a coaching model needs to be one that is relatively simple and practical, yet comprehensive enough to handle a broad set of learning needs while governed by professional standards and principles of systems thinking. Such a model has the following components:

- Preparation
- Solutions search
- Situational analysis
- Behavioral assessment
- Structure and organization
- Reflection, learning and insight
- Relationship building and continuity
- Cognitive and emotional exploration
- Personal and professional dimensions

In essence, professional personal coaching needs a practical system of learning for the organization and individual employees. The deceptively simple model of coaching described below is such a system, which if conducted "professionally" will handle all of the intricacies of personal coaching and meet the criteria and standards discussed so far.

CONDUCTING A COACHING SESSION

For many, coaching another person is a daunting task and a forbidding moment. Managers are nervous, employees get anxious, and human resources professionals get frustrated because they often end up dealing with the results of poor coaching. This is seen, for examples, in managers' negative views of having to give performance reviews (actually, an excellent time to do some coaching).

All of the angst begs the question: how can a face-to-face coaching session be conducted in a way that makes it easy, professional and adds value? The answer lies in rethinking the purpose, process, steps and outcomes of coaching. The purpose and process have been outlined above in the section on definition. The actual steps to conduct coaching that will produce the required outcomes is discussed next.

Professional, face-to-face coaching has three parts: **Preparation, Delivery, and Assessment**. For each part, we will examine some of the key issues when preparing to coach and then describe how to coach with **POISE**, as depicted in Table 1.

I. PREPARATION. Experience shows that before conducting a coaching session it is imperative to prepare mentally and situationally. With good preparation comes the possibility of creating the right learning environment and interpersonal demeanor that allows the potential in the individual to emerge (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999).

First, as a coach, preparation requires preparing one's mind for the discussion and to consider the following principles: *coaching is not designed to change personality, but behavior; it is best to focus on the future and not too much on the past. Coaching is about helping people by solving problems. Commitment to change is always higher if the employee thinks of an acceptable solution rather than the coach.* As coaches, an important part of preparation is for us to assess our mental attitude and where necessary reset our mood, frame of mind, interpersonal demeanor,

and tone of voice. Coaches are obliged to be good role models for the interpersonal skills they are coaching, especially listening carefully and deeply.

Mental preparation, then, also requires quiet reflection on one's own coaching style and how the details of an issue or problem relate to the bigger picture. The reflection can include asking oneself:

1. What is my demeanor going to be and why?
2. What kind of relationship do I want/need after the coaching session?
3. How will the employee perceive me during the coaching?
4. What would I like the employee to say to others about my coaching?
5. What might be the short-term and long-term benefits to the employee?
6. How can I help the employee be more effective and self-directed?

Secondly, the coach's preparation needs to be put into perspective by understanding the larger context of which the employee to be coached, is a part. Context preparation is situational. The coach must understand what is going on in *this* situation, what key events have occurred, what behavioral patterns have been observed, and what cause and effect relationships are discernable. This can be done in four ways:

1. Gathering data about the employee's performance to make sure all of the facts are known and the nature of the performance issue (or problem) is thoroughly understood.
2. Understanding what is contributing to the performance and to think through how the current performance impacts oneself, other people and the employee's role and work objectives.
3. Observing the employee's work behavior directly (where possible) to ensure any expressed views by colleagues and ones own conclusions are valid and not based on hearsay or rumor.
4. Preparing to deliver a session using the POISE framework (see below).

Lastly, good preparation requires the coach to develop a "contract" with the employee's manager and if needed, with HR. The contract defines the broad coaching process and development goals in the context of the employee's current performance. More specific goals can then be subsequently formulated between the coach and the

employee during the first coaching session. In some instances, even before the coaching begins, it is a good idea to have a “contracting meeting” with the employee’s manager, the coach and the employee to clarify more precisely what the coaching is supposed to accomplish and why (Sherman and Freas, 2004). Armed with good preparation of personal style and the situation in its full context, the coach is ready to conduct the coaching session.

II. DELIVERY. Conducting a coaching session can take many forms -- almost as many ways as there are coaches. In an attempt to bring a logical, consistent, and professional process to coaching, a set of POISE steps is recommended. As table 2 shows, POISE is an acronym that represents the five steps of how to conduct an effective coaching session. The steps are: 1) Purpose, 2) Observations, 3) Impact, 4) Solutions and 5) Expectations. For the purpose of this discussion and clarity, POISE is described as if the whole framework is being used in the sequence presented. In reality these steps can be used in part or in whole as the coaching situation warrants.

Step 1. PURPOSE. Coaching begins by the coach discussing directly the purpose for having the meeting in the first place. Unfortunately, this simple step is often overlooked causing confusion and perhaps greater anxiety. The purposes may be defined by the employee’s immediate manager, from a leadership development process that includes 360 survey data; or it may be initiated by HR. The reason for mentioning the purpose (s) is to make sure the coach and employee are completely aligned on *why* they are meeting, thus avoiding any surprises. Purposes may include, to:

- Correct a problem
- Produce an individual development plan
- Interpret interview data
- Analyze a survey feedback report, or
- Help with transitioning to a new role or job

The purpose step is a brief discussion that is also designed to establish *rapport* and set *expectations*. Establishing rapport is particularly important because it helps to put people at ease, an important issue for many employees who may need to overcome the fear of coaching or get nervous about “formal” sessions to examine their performance (Dotlich & Cairo, 1999). Regarding expectations, experience shows that if the coach and employee quickly become mentally aligned on why they are meeting, the employee will be able to “hear” the observations and feedback in the next step. Clarity of purpose therefore, sharpens focus, prevents misunderstanding, and gets the coaching underway.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Step 2. OBSERVATIONS. This step should identify the employee’s development need and establish clear goals for the coaching. If the coaching process includes data gathering by interviewing colleagues or administering a leadership development questionnaire, step two is a presentation of trends and patterns the coach has observed in the data. When reviewing such data, it is *always* best to begin with *positive* feedback. Regardless of age or rank, all human beings enjoy hearing something good being said about them, including, from my experience, senior managers. Following the positive observations, the coach is then obliged to share the negative things observed in the data. It is useful to point out that weaknesses are always counterbalanced with strengths and those strengths are a useful foundation to improve weaknesses. For example, a low result in “risk taking” can be changed by examining how strengths in “teamwork” can be used to foster greater risk taking among team colleagues.

If data have not been gathered, step two becomes more of a dialogue where the coach first shares observations, facts, implications, and conclusions about the

employee's performance, then helps the employee to explore what the *employee* believes are the personal and professional performance issues that need improvement. This is an aligning process that converts the broad development goals (agreed to in the meeting with the person's manager and HR) into specific ones. At this stage the coach's role includes asking questions, understanding the employees business context, re-framing issues, looking for logical connections, identify cause and effect patterns, testing assumptions, and generally trying to achieve clarity. All of this is designed to produce a clear set of specific coaching goals which ends up being the "coaching contract" agreed to by both employee and coach.

At senior levels step two coaching typically focuses on cognitive-behavioral issues, such as, for example: verbal interpersonal skills, intellectual problem solving ability, the speed of problem resolution, testing assumptions about people or professional style, and certainties about the best ways to achieve results.

Once a comprehensive picture of the situation has been established and the coaching goals are clear, the next step is to help the employee to acknowledge the need to change and to accept personal responsibility for creating the existing psychological and organizational climate. This is particularly true for managers, as research has found they have the greatest impact on climate (Stringer, 2002). One of the best ways to achieve this is to engage the employee in a detailed and honest assessment of the person's impact on the climate.

Step 3. IMPACT. The purpose of this step is to establish culpability. The step is often overlooked or muddled with step two or four. It simply requires identifying how the employee's past behavior has impacted results, work, other colleagues, the climate, or the person's manager. With some senior managers, it is only when they realize the magnitude of the consequences of their behavior that they can understand

and acknowledge that their thinking and behavior must change. “Impact analysis” is a tactic to overcome resistance, denial or indifference, when they occur.

The impact discussion is useful with “difficult” managers who for a variety of reasons may be cynical, tend to blame others, dismiss their own role in the matter, or deny that they can change anything because they are “too old and too set in their ways.” The impact discussion is designed to break through those kinds of barriers. For example, if the coaching is part of a leadership development program, some long-service leaders will claim indifference to development because they are close to retirement and don’t plan to change anything. As a last resort, the coach can appeal to the person’s sense of legacy and point to the person’s impact on the long-term memory of the organization.

When employees start to use systems thinking to see the larger context of their role and their impact, it can be a powerful motivator that induces a desire to change. While there are stubborn exceptions, in the end, most managers will acknowledge their role in a (bad) situation and try to change, so long as the coach is well prepared, meets the criteria for good observations, has facts and evidence, and has the person’s best interests at heart

Step 4. SOLUTIONS SEARCH. Coaching is legitimized and validated by the solutions it achieves. This makes “solution search” a critical step in the coaching process and since it is mostly dialogue, this part of the coaching should take the longest.

Venting. Time pressures and previous coaching experiences often lead coaches to make the mistake of offering solutions and telling the employee what and how to do something. This is a mistake. Whenever possible, the employee should be encouraged to *discover, identify, name* and *state* the solution. It does take more time,

but if the solution is expressed by the employee there is a much greater probability that the person will be committed to implementing it. Only then is it worth discussing *how* to implement the agreed-upon solution.

There may be a lot of things the employee needs to say and explain. Explaining does not always mean rationalization or denial, which the coach can always test if needed. By giving the person a chance to “vent” the employee will be more receptive and in a better *frame of mind* for the coaching. Throughout, the coach must listen with a critical ear, take notes, remain calm and focused, and truly listen to the employee regardless of where the conversation goes. Here again, preparation is key. A coach who is prepared, confident and able to keep an eye on the purpose of the coaching, will be able to correct the employee if necessary and recognize solutions emerging in the employee’s mind. If the session drifts the coach can always refer to the POISE plan to bring it back to the relevant issues. On the other hand, the coach who cannot facilitate discussion, is uncomfortable being specific from lack of preparation, or tries to dominate for fear of losing control, will miss crucial information and increase the chance that the employee will conclude the session was a waste of time.

Dialogue. A key to effective coaching is the use of dialogue. The concept of “dialogue” has become clearer in recent years (Isaacs, 1993; Schein, 1993; Senge, 1990). Dialogue fosters a full expression of ideas, open ended exploration, creative thinking, innovative solutions, and brainstorming. Dialogic conversations are interactive, complementary, contextual, non-defensive, relaxed and open ended.

Dialogue, in fact, may be the very interpersonal skill the employee needs in order to overcome a tendency to debate, deny, dominate, or denigrate people when working with others. The coach can role model how to stimulate dialogue.

Style and Trust. It is important to note that executives like intellectual challenge but resist (even resent) being told what to do. Only when trust is high will senior managers be less skeptical and take direction from a coach. Until then, the coach may need to be assertive but frame ideas and give advice as “suggestions”, “considerations”, and “hypotheses.” The coach’s emotional intelligence becomes a key competency at this stage of the process and since confrontation usually does not work, the coach needs to get the right balance between a “push and “pull” style. Along the way, all coaches can build trust by being credible, reliable, personable and selfless (Maister, 2000).

The end point of step four is when the coach can agree with the solution identified by the employee and is ready to bring the session to a close by talking about the immediate future.

Step 5. EXPECTATIONS AND ENCOURAGEMENT. We are now approaching the end of the coaching session. After a good dialogue that examined the issues, identified the employee’s impact, and produced a good solution, it is important for the coach to, 1) provide encouragement; 2) offer continuing help; 3) express an understanding of how difficult it is to apply new behaviors and to change old ways of thinking; and 4) set expectations for future coaching sessions.

At this stage coaching needs to take a business-like approach to ensure expectations, encouragement, and reassurance are reinforced. For example the coach might say: *“I found this session to be very productive and, as your coach, I want you to succeed. So, I hope that you will work on what we have discussed and you have agreed to do. I know it may be difficult at first, but give it a try...I am here to help...if you need help. So please reach out to me between now and our next session. What is going to be your first step?”*

Coaches must be very careful not to be seen as arrogant, condescending, pedantic, or unsure, as they share their views, expectations and encouragement. Even with a business-like approach, experience shows that by empathizing and perhaps even sharing a personal example of “how hard it is to change,” the coach can positively encourage the employee to try but without insulting or embarrassing the person. All of this becomes easier as the relationship strengthens and trust grows stronger. Then the coach can increase the degree of assertiveness and “push” more than “pull.” The net result of combining expectations and encouragement tied to coaching goals is to provide an upbeat way to end the coaching session, but on a professional footing.

Finally, it can be very effective to hold the employee accountable for making progress against goals with a follow-up telephone call or by reviewing progress at the beginning of the next session. However, with senior management in particular, it is critical to talk about their responsibility for making progress without sounding patronizing, as they may interpret the discussion as offensive to their sense of pride and dignity (Caruso, 2004).

III. POST-COACHING SESSION. As a practical matter, once the formal POISE coaching session is completed, where needed, follow up dates are set for additional coaching. The coach thanks the employee for a productive session and reiterates the hope for future sessions. After the session the coach may need to update employee files and records. If a good deal of contact is expected with the employee, say, for example, at departmental team meetings, it is wise for an internal coach to think about how to maintain the right professional balance – formal and friendly. External coaches do this automatically; but internal coaches must be cognizant of keeping the right professional demeanor.

COACHING PRINCIPLES

Before, during and after each session, while preparing for and administering coaching, it is a good idea to keep in mind the twenty five principles listed in Table three.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

One principle worth emphasizing is that strict *confidentially* must be maintained throughout the entire process and for all of the coaching sessions. Even when asked, “How did it go?” the coach’s standard response is, “Very well, please speak to him/her directly about it”. Normally a record of the executive coaching session is *not* made. However, as it is on occasion, if the coaching is an open and public process, records may be kept. This does happen occasionally when organizations use coaching for leadership development purposes, or at the other extreme, records are kept if coaching is the first step on a formal performance review process because of a persistent problem. Because confidentiality is so important, any record keeping should be made known to the employee and clarified with HR and the employee’s manager at the start of the coaching process, as part of the “coaching contract” preparation step.

LONG-TERM COACHING

Should the coaching require several sessions or when external coaches are retained for long-term assignments spread out over many months, it is a good idea for the coach to assess periodically how the coaching is going by asking:

- Are we on the right track?
- Is the fit between us still right?
- Is there something you’d rather be focused on?
- What adjustments do I need to make?
- How can we make our sessions more useful?

In other words, the coach role models the underlying coaching values and principles of learning, change, and development, by demonstrating how to do it. Since longer term coaching has become the norm in executive coaching, asking those questions at the mid-point of the coaching timetable is in itself a demonstration of professionalism.

CONCLUSION

At all organizational levels, coaching is being used to help employees strengthen capabilities, clear the air, overcome performance problems, align performance expectations, stay on track, learn new things or build teamwork. Just as all professions require rigorous standards of practice, for business coaching to be more professional coaches must conduct themselves more professionally. The POISE method provides a straight-forward way to professionalize coaching with its corresponding values, principles, structure and practical underpinnings.

Coaches can use POISE to conduct Developmental/Extended sessions with any employee on any issue. The five steps can be used for *preparing* the coaching session by thinking through the issues and content to be covered, any specific information or data to be conveyed, and the questions that need to be asked. POISE also helps with *delivery* as a set of “crib notes” to guide the coaching session and if necessary to keep things on track. Experience demonstrates that POISE provides a way to have a really useful coaching conversation, one that models conversation and dialogue rather than lecture and control, resolves problems rather than determines blame, fosters learning, and builds long-term, healthy relationships.

In short, professionalizing coaching will increase the return on investment and results which is especially important now, as managers clearly prefer and expect coaching as one way to produce future leaders. We hope that coaching with POISE will make an initial contribution to that end.

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Figure 1. Dimensions and Types of Coaching

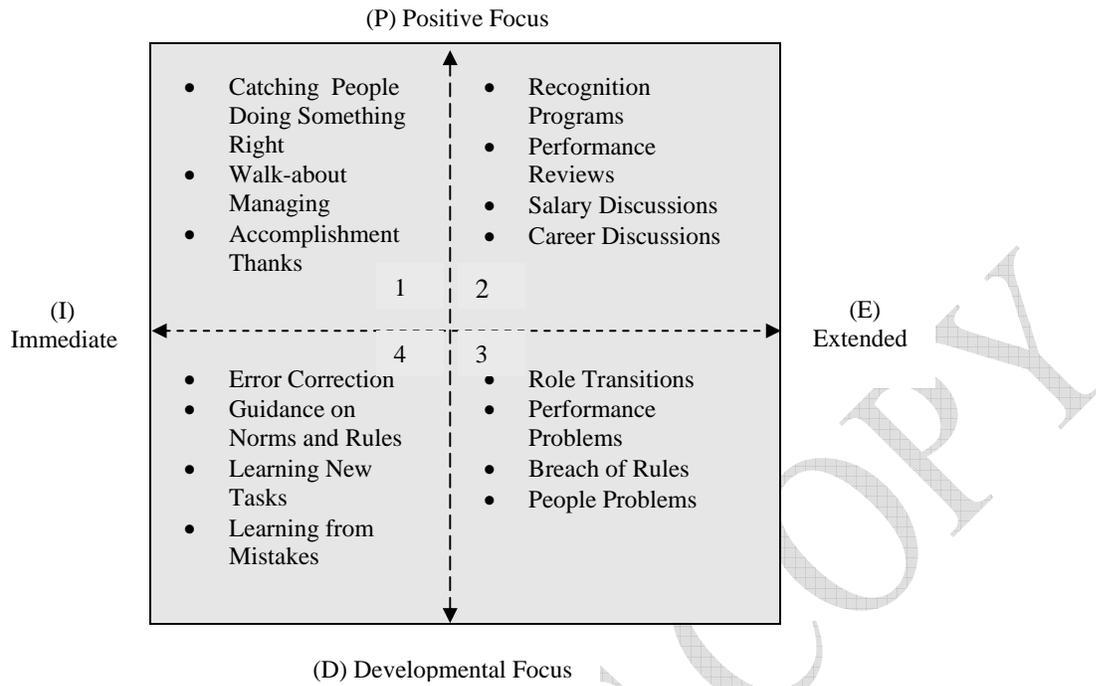


Table 1. Common Coaching Issues by Target Group

ISSUE	EMPL	MGR	EXEC
1. Listening more effectively	X	X	X
2. Controlling emotions	X	X	X
3. Developing emotional intelligence	X	X	X
4. Becoming less abrasive	X	X	X
5. Improving interpersonal skills	X	X	X
6. Violating company rules and policies	X	X	
7. Understanding new responsibilities	X	X	
8. Getting along with one's manager		X	X
9. Transitioning to a new position		X	X
10. Supervising people		X	X
11. Publicly criticizing someone		X	X
12. Making effective presentations		X	X
13. Political savvy		X	X
14. Working with organizational paradoxes		X	X
15. Not contributing at meetings	X	X	
16. Playing around	X	X	
17. Not submitting work on time	X	X	
18. Using inappropriate language	X	X	
19. Lateness	X		
20. Spending personal time on the telephone	X		
21. Personal hygiene	X		
22. Taking long and too many smoking breaks	X		
23. Taking control of one's career		X	
24. Resolving conflict situations		X	
25. Not achieving a balanced score card			X

Table 2. Overview of POISE Coaching

STEPS	PURPOSES	OUTCOME
1. PURPOSE	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a positive tone • To get in step with other • Break the ice • Create open atmosphere 	RAPPOR
2. OBSERVATIONS	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State the issue or problem • Provide examples • State facts • Directly talk about it 	REMIND
3. IMPACT	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss impact of behavior • Raise commitment to change 	RELATE
4. SOLUTIONS	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover optional resolutions • Choose a course of action • Define new behavior 	RESOLVE
5. EXPECTATIONS & ENCOURAGEMENT	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide empathy • Create a expectation • Offer help • Give encouragement 	REASSURE

Table 3. Twenty-five Principles of Effective Coaching

COACHING IN GENERAL

1. Periodically check if the coaching process can be made more useful.
2. Always discuss performance issues in the context of helping not punishing; guiding not embarrassing; supporting not inducing failure.
3. Coaching is the facilitation of learning.
4. Allow two-way discussion to occur.
5. Use two dimensions: *Time* (immediate to extended) and *Focus* (positive to developmental).
6. Coaching has three parts: Preparation, Delivery, and Assessment.
7. Coaching has its own set of skills that require practice and refinement.
8. Meet the criteria for good observations, having facts and evidence, and the employee's best interests at heart.
9. As help is offered, be very careful not to be arrogant, condescending, pedantic, or unsure.
10. Be conscious of "style," or the timing, pacing and rhythm; language used; the logic of the coaching session; as well as tone and manner.

PREPARATION

11. Writing out each POISE steps as notes for use while conducting the coaching session.
12. Preparation means data gathering, situation analysis, and preparing one's mind.
13. Ensure the facts are known and the nature of the performance is understood.

OBSERVATIONS

14. Focus on personal and professional *behaviors* and *skills* for all employees regardless of level.
15. Always begin with *positive* feedback before giving providing corrective, critical, or negative feedback.
16. Ensure conclusions are valid and not based on hearsay and rumor.

IMPACT

17. Understand the effects of employee's behavior on the coach, other people, and the work.
18. When poor performers understand the magnitude of the *consequence* of what they are doing, they then realize their performance must change.

SOLUTIONS SEARCH

19. Solutions search takes the longest and is the most important part of coaching.
20. Solutions search requires dialogue for success.
21. Use POISE to bring the session back to the main topic, if things drift.
22. Give people a chance to "vent" to put them in a better frame of mind.

EXPECTATIONS AND ENCOURAGEMENT

23. Provide an upbeat way to end the coaching session.
24. Check if employees are willing and able to learn and change.
25. The signals of successful coaching are observable change, learning and improvement.