



# HOW TO IMPLEMENT AN EFFECTIVE COACHING STRATEGY

Keeping Cinderella's coach from turning into a pumpkin

By Professor Jack Denfeld Wood - October, 2008

IMD

Chemin de Bellerive 23  
PO Box 915,  
CH-1001 Lausanne  
Switzerland

Tel: +41 21 618 01 11

Fax: +41 21 618 07 07

info@imd.ch

<http://www.imd.ch>

Coaching is the latest buzz—but all too often companies embark on coaching initiatives that are not well thought out, that their executives do not embrace, and that are doomed to fail. In Chapter 24 of the OWP (Orchestrating Winning Performance) Book 2008, “Riding the winds of global change”, to be published in September 2008, Professor Jack Wood explains how organizations can instead implement a thoughtful, integrated coaching strategy which can deliver long-lasting results.

### The purpose of coaching isn't performance improvement

HR managers often assume that the purpose of coaching is to increase managers' performance. However, our survey of participants attending a pilot coaching session in the OWP revealed that this is not what executives want. The top three coaching objectives were:

- **life development** – balancing personal and professional roles more effectively
- **leadership** – developing interpersonal and team leadership skills
- **self-awareness** – becoming more aware of my shortcomings and growth opportunities as a leader, and understanding the origins and history of my behavior in work and its impact on others.

### The difference between coaches, mentors and managers

Coaching initiatives fail in part because the distinction between the role of manager, mentor and coach is not well understood. Each can each help executives meet their principal objectives—life development, leadership and self-awareness—but a manager, a mentor and a coach are not the same things. Their roles are distinct, their tasks are different, and each is occupied with different aspects of an executive's daily job, long-term career and life.

### Managers

A manager occupies a formal role within an organization and is responsible for ensuring that the primary tasks of the team/department/business unit/corporation are met. A manager can use coaching skills to informally coach a subordinate, but this “coaching” is in the service of the subordinate's organizational task. Asking a manager to formally coach a subordinate is structurally incongruent – it pits the roles of manager (for whom the organizational task is primary) and coach (for whom the individual well-being is primary) against each other.

## Mentors

A mentor occupies a close interpersonal role and helps guide a protégé's corporate career choices. A mentor can be a formally designated role or an informally acquired one. Formal mentors help their protégé understand the organization and support their journey within it, with the assumption of a long-term career in the company. An informal mentor does the same, but is more focused on addressing more personal and career developmental needs—if necessary outside the organization.

## Coach

A coach is concerned with deep personal and professional development—the emphasis is on personal. The most effective coaches are external to the company, where they are independent of organizational pressure and political influence and free to offer more-or-less objective counsel and guidance. It is difficult, if not impossible, to create the necessary confidential space and trust with an executive if his or her coaching relationship is embedded within the organization's formal structure.

## The engineering and clinical approaches to coaching

Most corporate coaching initiatives take an engineering approach to human behavior using a conscious, rational and concrete approach. This method identifies areas for improvement and then applies tools, processes and procedures to increase performance. This approach can be helpful for some aspects of professional development, but it only indirectly addresses what our survey shows is more important to managers—the psychological integration of both personal and professional aspects of their lives. If employees are suffering in their jobs and in their lives, providing engineering solutions to this suffering misses the point entirely.

Some organizations work with a clinical approach to coaching. Coaches who are clinically trained have the capacity and skill to explore the unconscious and emotional domains where real work and family life happens. Most coaches, even professional ones, have limited experience and a limited capacity to work clinically. Clinical coaches look at the whole human social system in which their client lives—family and work—and recognize that an individual's behavior is a complex result of influences derived from varied social and psychological elements. Clinical coaching helps employees integrate the different components of their lives to achieve social harmony and psychological integration.

## Constructing a corporate coaching culture

Clearly, companies wishing to implement a successful company-wide coaching initiative need to take into account their managers' most important objectives—life-long development, enhanced leadership skills and increased self-awareness.

Companies can, and should, train their executives in coaching skills, but must remain aware that such skills in managers and mentors is no substitute for engaging competent, external, clinically oriented coaches who work with the “whole person” and “whole organization” and not simply the individual employee, and who can address the multiple social and psychological forces that impinge on their clients.

### The following options can help establish a corporate coaching culture:

#### External personal coaching

Companies intuitively recognize that it is desirable for senior managers to have an external coach—in fact most senior managers insist on it—but companies don't extend this consideration to mid- and junior-level managers, and that is a mistake. Managers at all levels benefit in exactly the same way from discrete, private and confidential coaching that allows the exploration of sensitive personal and professional material. This is an expensive proposition, so how can clinical coaching at all levels be initiated?

#### Team leadership coaching

“Team leadership” coaching is less expensive than private coaching but can be equally powerful. This involves a group of managers—for example a designated group of high-potentials or a project team or executive committee—who work collectively with one coach or a limited team of coaches for a combination of group and individual sessions. The use of clinically trained team leadership coaches allows subsequent coaching to become part of a longer-term personal and professional development that is integrated into the larger organizational system and strategic direction. Familiarity with this complexity – understanding how to think psychologically in an organizational context – can lay the foundations of lifelong learning for groups of executives that can be applied in virtually any collective situation, and represents a significant organizational development and change initiative.

## Peer coaching

Coaching of, and being coached by, others at the same organizational level is easily integrated into the team leadership design mentioned above. Peer coaching is often initiated within programs at management institutes and is a very effective and inexpensive alternative to simple individual coaching when it is continued after the program within the company. Peer coaching helps form a group of associates who develop fundamental trust, are used to confiding in each other, and who work interdependently and collaboratively to address and resolve personal and professional problems as they arise. Peer coaching, properly done, can provide a person with a life-long group of trustworthy friends and colleagues.

## Questions to ask:

- How might I benefit from coaching?
- How might my company benefit from coaching?
- What are the differences in the role of manager, mentor and coach?
- How can I integrate executive coaching? Team coaching? Peer coaching?
- How do I understand the difference between an “engineering” and a “clinical” approach to behavioral coaching?
- What must you consider to establish a successful corporate coaching culture?

**Jack Wood** is Professor of Leadership and Organizational Behavior at IMD. He is responsible for the year-long MBA Leadership Stream and is the forthcoming Director of the “high potential” Building on Talent (BOT) program.

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