

Coaching

with teeth

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What can you do when people don't respond to a softly-softly coaching approach?

The aim of this module is to give you some great questions to put to people who are coaching resistant. The content is based on an adapted version of Sir John Whitmore's Skill Will Matrix.

Introduction

During the course of your coaching, have you found that some people are coach-proof – that is, they are resistant to all attempts at coaching them? If so, coaching with teeth will help you with the so-called 'difficult to coach' types. Within every organisation, on every coaching course, one typical comment is: 'I have someone who works for me, who causes me a lot of anxiety. They don't seem happy to be here. People in the team listen to them, and all they say when I ask them to talk to me is that everything is "Fine!" What should I do with them?'

There are some people who are very, very difficult to coach. There needs to be some willingness on their part to open up to the

manager, and if it is not present, coaching becomes an uphill struggle.

Quick overview of the skill will model

The original skill will model, developed by Sir John Whitmore, helped the coaching manager to think about the most appropriate approach to use with their staff, depending on length of service, levels of knowledge and motivation.

The model (see Figure 1) is divided into four boxes, with skill (or knowledge) along the horizontal axis and will (or motivation) along the vertical axis. By working out where people are, based on their levels of knowledge and motivation, you can adapt your style to meet their needs.

It is worth saying here that the model isn't meant to be prescriptive, but merely offers guidelines. People might move into different boxes depending on different tasks or roles within their

jobs. So, for instance, a person who has been in their job for 18 months would naturally fit into the high knowledge, possibly high motivation (position 4) slot for most of their work. This would suggest a more hands-off style, the employee having a high degree of control over their work. However, if they are suddenly landed with project managing in an area they know less about, they may begin to feel uncomfortable about their lack of knowledge and require some guidance from their manager. Their style would now be one of more guiding type behaviour for this specific task (position 2). Once they feel more comfortable, the more hands-off approach would again be applicable.

Key learning points

- ◆ Effective coaching questions for coach-proof people.
- ◆ Using an adapted skill will matrix.
- ◆ Two case studies that illustrate the successful use of 'coaching with teeth' within organisations.

Another example: 'OK, we have met twice now. The last time we met, I asked you to prepare for our next meeting. This has not happened. I will happily meet you again when you are prepared to put 50 per cent of the effort into making our 1-1 a success.' Be careful not to sound parental.

Scaling

This is used to challenge someone non-directly.

Coach: 'On a scale of 1-10, how motivated are you to complete this task?'

Coachee: 'Two.'

Coach: 'OK, I understand that. However, it is part of your role. What would need to happen to make this a higher score and for you to feel motivated?'

Another example: 'As a percentage, what influence did you or do you have over this situation? So what are you going to do with that? What are you prepared to do about your situation?' This is intended to highlight the fact that they have a part to play in anything that has happened to them.

Some example questions that fit into coaching with teeth:

- What evidence do you have that this is true?
- Where does it say it should be fair?
- What impact do you think your behaviour has on the team or customers?
- How long are you prepared to feel angry or unhappy about this?
- What is the effect upon you of being so angry for so long?
- What have you done about this situation?
- How prepared are you to change?
- What will you gain and lose if this change comes in?
- What are you going to do about it?
- What is really going on?
- What choices do you have?

Case study 2

This case study came from an airline.

A purser was having problems with some crew members. One was very resistant to being coached, so the purser used some coaching with teeth statements just to 'shock' the conversation slightly.

First meeting

Purser: Have you had a chance to prepare for your appraisal?

Crew member: No, not really.

Purser: So, what have you done to prepare, then?

Crew member: Nothing – I don't see the point of it.

Purser: OK, sometimes people can feel that way. However, I have prepared for your appraisal. I suggest we suspend this meeting now and meet again when you have prepared.

Second meeting

Purser: This is our second meeting now; have you had a chance to prepare?

Crew member: Sort of.

Purser: OK, let's go through it together. Last time we met you said that you did not see any point of doing the preparation – tell me about that.

Crew member: Well, I am only doing this job as a fill-in until something else comes along.

Purser: That is your choice. How long do you intend to be with us?

Crew member: Twelve months max!

Purser: That is fine. Whilst you are here, I expect a certain standard of work and for you to be motivated enough to do your job to that standard. What are your thoughts around that?

The purser could then follow up with questions around 'What is the impact of you working on the aircraft with low motivation?', 'What could you be doing whilst you are here to prepare yourself better for your next job?'

Conclusion

To conclude, the main focus of coaching with teeth is to try to remain in a positive coaching frame of mind, albeit with a slightly firmer approach. Ultimately, as a manager, you can go into more of a 'tell' style of interaction if it does not work, but it gives you some options along the way.

It is very much about addressing the things that sometimes we don't want to address.

References

- 1 P Tizzard, 'Body Coaching', *Coach the Coach*, Issue 7, 2004.

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One of the groups falls into what I would call low motivation but high knowledge. Whilst again being careful about generalising, some examples of people that might sit in this box would be people who:

- were passed over for promotion;
- have been in the job a long time;
- are marking time prior to retirement;
- disagree with a change a company is going through;
- are just doing the minimum to get by, for whatever reason;
- don't feel valued for what they have done in the past.

There can be a whole host of reasons. Some are quite innocent, others not so.

The 'coaching with teeth' idea came about during a course I was running at Virgin. A colleague used the

expression for the technique she used when coaching people who needed a 'nudge'. She used coaching questions with an edge as a way of helping the person to move on. In a nutshell, all the rules of using coaching are the same, except that you are moving from coaching with slippers on to coaching with hob-nailed boots on instead.

At face value, we accept the verisimilitude of what the person tells us: 'Everything is fine.' But our gut reaction sometimes is that it is clearly not. The idea behind coaching with teeth is that we follow the statement and see where it ends up. Some basic guidelines to this approach might be these.

Say what you see

Example: 'I have asked you four times what I can do to improve the situation for you. You have not

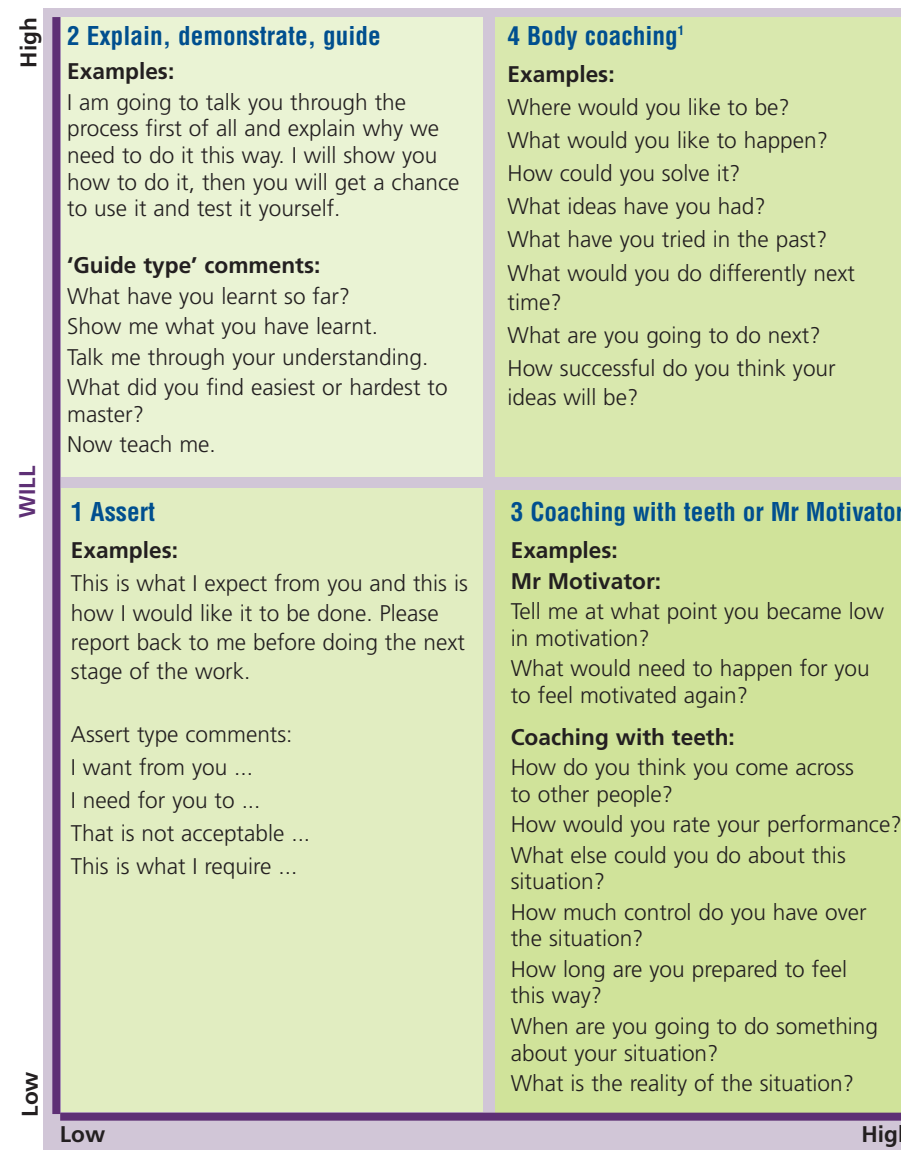


Fig. 1: The skill will model

answered me once and you are not making any eye contact with me.'

You name the facts as you see them. If someone gets angry, you stop trying to do the 1-1 session or appraisal and deal with what has just happened. You are, in effect, holding up a mirror for them to see what you see. The situation of conflict could be a microcosm of what is going on for them, so follow the flow.

Reality check

This is where you ask questions like 'What evidence do you have that

this is so?', 'You said it's not fair – where does it say it should be?'

This is scary, but it can be quite powerful. People can become mildly deluded when they hang on to something that they feel was rightly theirs. Sometimes they need to be given a swift reminder that life is like that by asking them some great coaching with teeth questions.

Challenge words

When people say 'should', 'could', 'must' or 'ought to', you

Case study 1

Sam is a manager within a financial services company. She is responsible for a team of three. She recruited two of her team not long after she took up her position as manager. On joining the company as an outsider, she was told that an internal candidate, Bill, had applied for her job and that he would be joining her as part of her team. Although typical, this is probably one of the worst situations for a new manager to encounter.

The initial conversations with Bill were not good. He seemed hostile and did not want to talk to her about his aspirations, or indeed anything of substance – apart from saying, 'Fine.'

Sam, a trained coach, had tried everything that she could to be reasonable with Bill, but all to no avail. Then Sam came on one of my coaching with teeth courses.

Before coming on the course, Sam's coaching conversations with Bill went something like this:

Sam: What is it you want from me as your manager?

Bill: Well, that's your job.

Sam: Yes, it is, but I work better when I am working in a more collaborative way with people.

Bill: Well I'm fine. It is the others ...

Sam was finding this type of conversation very tiring.

After applying a coaching with teeth approach, Sam's coaching conversations with Bill went something like this:

Sam: What is it you want from me as your manager?
 Bill: Well, that's your job.
 Sam: Why should you?, 'What if you didn't?'

Bottom line

OK, the bottom line is that I am not prepared to put up with this

Sam: What is it you want from me as your manager?

Bill: Well, that's your job.

Sam: OK, let's take time out. I am not happy to go on with this if this is not of any use to you. I feel very frustrated when I ask you questions and you say 'Fine.' I feel as if you don't want to talk to me. What is really going on here as you see it?

Bill: It is not fair. I have been here ages and have not been recognised for it. People come from nowhere and take all the jobs.

Sam: How do you feel about me getting the job that you went for?

Bill: Well, it's not your fault, but it is not right.

Sam: How long have you felt like this?

Bill: About a year now.

Sam: So, you are saying that you have been angry for a year. How much longer are you prepared to be angry for?
 Or, what is the impact of you being angry for so long?

Now, to some this might just seem like just ordinary coaching – and to a degree it is. The difference is that you are not hiding from the issue; you are really confronting what is going on, not just hoping that it will all magically get better.

behaviour any more. What are you going to do to change your behaviour?

This is true jugular stuff, but there has to be a point where you draw a line.