

**Effective Coaching
by Marshall J. Cook
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Discussion Guide***

The role of a coach in the workplace is to help the individual or the team develop and succeed. Coaching employees and teams is ultimately the most critical role of any manager.

A trainer using this book should naturally serve as an exemplary coach to his or her group of managers. This means, among other things, paying close attention to their input, and asking appropriate follow-up questions, and being sensitive to their body language and their emotions. In other words, treat the training session as you would have them treat any coaching situation with their employees.

The following guide outlines how I would use *Effective Coaching* in training managers.

*Prepared by Robert Magnan, Ph.D.

Note: *Effective Coaching* by Marshall J. Cook is also available in Spanish: *Coaching Efectivo: Cómo Aprovechar la Motivación Oculta de Su Fuerza Laboral* (McGraw-Hill Interamericana, 2000).

Chapter 1. The Goals of Good Coaching

It's only logical that this book begins with a diagnostic tool, to help each manager become more aware of his or her management style. I would ask the managers to take the Accessibility Quotient quiz (p. 2), but using a rating scale of 1 to 5. After they've rated themselves, I would lead a discussion of the results and what they mean, as outlined on pp. 2-6.

The section that details the benefits of coaching (pp. 6-11) can generate a loose discussion of coaching behaviors that the managers have observed. I would contrast those behaviors with traditional management techniques by asking how most managers would deal with the situations given as examples.

Chapter 2. The Attributes of a Good Coach

Following upon the behaviors discussed in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 begins by listing the 12 characteristics of the ideal coach (pp. 17-24). I would tie these attributes back to the behaviors that the managers cited as examples in our earlier discussion.

I would then have the managers rate themselves on those 12 characteristics with the test on p. 24. As a follow-up to the results of this quiz, I would have them examine and discuss the boss-coach comparison on p. 27. We would first return to the coaching behaviors that the managers had cited as exemplary earlier and discuss how the behaviors contrasted with the boss tendencies on the list. Then, I would ask them to think about where their employees would place them on each of the 11 continua formed by the comparison. I would encourage them to share their findings and any reactions.

Chapter 3. What Do Your Players Want?

Being an effective coach requires understanding what motivates your players. The purpose of this chapter is to make the managers more aware of the differences in motivation and more sensitive to identifying motivations and working with them.

To build on the presentation of the three drives outlined on pp. 31-35, I would ask the managers to provide examples of each drive by describing employees with whom they had worked or were working now. (If the managers in the group knew each other prior to the training session, I would urge them to avoid going into any detail on current employees that might allow the others to identify the employees.)

Chapter 3 concludes with some strategies for working with the three drives (pp. 35-38). Here it would be appropriate and useful to have the managers discuss more specific ways in which they could apply those strategies in their work environment:

- How could you encourage someone who is motivated by the need to achieve?
- How could you encourage someone who is motivated by the burn to learn?
- How could you encourage someone who is motivated by the craving to contribute?

Chapter 4. The Signs of Good Coaching

The first half of this chapter (pp. 39-45) covers body language and the ways a coach sends messages—positive and negative—without using words. To reinforce this lesson, I would use a series of role-plays here.

Use the desk or table at the front of the room; if there isn't any, put one there and set out some papers, books, pens and pencils, and other objects. Then, place a chair on the other side of it. That's the coach's office. Then, choose a manager to play the coach and another to play the employee. Begin the role-play with the coach sitting at the desk. Ask the employee to enter the room and begin a conversation. (Depending on the managers in your group, you might prepare some scenarios in advance: the employee has a complaint about a fellow employee, the employee wants to discuss a drinking problem, the employee wants to change job responsibilities, and so forth.)

Stop the role-play every minute or so and ask the others in the group to comment on the body language in use, by the coach and also by the employee. The basic questions to ask are the following:

- Is the coach using any body language? What is it? How might the employee interpret that language in this situation?
- Is the employee using any body language? What is it? How should the coach interpret that language in this situation? How should the coach react to that language?

I would do three, four, or five role-plays, depending on how well the managers in the group were analyzing the body language. For each of the scenarios that you have your managers role-play, you may want to vary the setting a little, by moving the table and chairs around. (You don't need to be an expert in feng shui to know that the layout of an office affects the interpersonal dynamics.)

The second half of the chapter (pp. 45-53) outlines the seven elements of a good coaching session. I would follow up the presentation of each element with questions about the role-plays done for the first half of this chapter. For each element, I would ask each series of questions below.

Establish a Purpose

In the role-play scenario _____, was a purpose established? Who established it? How? Did the other person pick up on that purpose? How?

Establish Ground Rules

In the role-play scenario _____, did the coach and employees establish ground rules? How? Did they abide by those rules?

Keep Focused

In the role-play scenario _____, did the coach stay focused on the employee and the purpose of the meeting? Did he or she do anything that might have distracted the employee? What message might this distractive behavior have conveyed?

Have a Conversation

In the role-play scenario _____, how would you characterize the meeting? A dialogue? A monologue by the coach? How could the coach have maintained a better balance in the conversation?

Speak Clearly

In the role-play scenario _____, did the coach speak clearly? How was his or her language? Simple enough? Specific enough? Did the employee understand? Was the meeting of appropriate length?

Pay Attention to the Issue

In the role-play scenario _____, did the coach pay attention to the issue? To what extent? Was this obvious to the employee? What could the coach have done better?

Stay Open

In the role-play scenario _____, did the coach seem to be open? How did he or she show this?

If you try to have your group discuss all seven elements for all of the roleplays, you're likely to take too much time and/or exhaust everybody. The managers should emerge from this part of the training program much more aware of the structure and dynamics of good coaching sessions.

Chapter 5. How to Ask Good Questions

The first part of this chapter (pp. 56-63) outlines the seven qualities of effective questions. I would follow up on this section with the following exercise.

I would first list these seven qualities on a display. Then I would read a series of short situations, each followed by a question. The situations would be similar to the scenarios used for the role-plays in Chapter 4: an employee comes to the coach with a question, a problem, a concern, a complaint, or a request and the coach asks a question. For each situation, I would ask the managers to rate the question according to the listed seven qualities. I would then ask them to suggest ways to improve the question.

The next part of Chapter 5 (pp. 63-67) presents seven major types of questions. As a quick exercise, I would return to the situations used in the preceding exercise. I would read the situation and the question and then ask the managers which type of question the coach was asking.

Chapter 6. How to Be a Good Listener

This chapter consists of the seven keys to effective listening (pp. 70-77) and the three Rs of effective listening (p. 77). This is a straightforward, prescriptive presentation that would work well with a reverse exercise.

I would develop each of these 10 points by asking members of the group to share any bad experiences with managers who were deficient in regard to any of the points—i.e., they weren't prepared, they didn't drop everything, they didn't maintain eye contact, they didn't hear it all before responding, they didn't take notes, they didn't acknowledge feelings, they didn't allow silence, they didn't receive, they didn't reflect, they didn't rephrase. I would probe with the following basic questions:

- When have you tried to talk with a manager who [...]? Describe the situation and his or her behavior.
- How did you feel? Did you convey your feelings to this manager? If so, how?

The focus of this exercise is for the managers to recall their reactions to inappropriate listening behavior and to become more aware of how to improve their own listening skills and more sensitive to any adverse reactions of their employees.

Chapter 7. Solving Problems by Coaching

This chapter begins with seven steps to effective problem solving (pp. 80-83), with examples. The rest of the chapter (pp. 83-91) applies those steps in three situations, ranging in difficulty from low to high. An appropriate follow-up exercise might be a full and open role-play.

I would prepare three or four situations, each consisting of a setting (organization, type and size of business, and so forth) and a problem, along the lines of the harpsichord and pencil scenarios in the book.

Then, I would choose a boss and four to seven employees, depending on the size of the training group and the nature of the situation created for the role-play. Those chosen would demonstrate how to solve the problem by applying the seven-step approach. The other managers in the group would judge their efforts; I would encourage them to raise a hand and comment on any aspects of the process, focusing on the following points:

- Are the coach and the employees proceeding step by step?
- Are the outcomes of each step appropriate and sufficient? In other words, the definition of the opportunity, the definition of their goal, the action statement, the action plan, the standard for evaluating the results, a shared understanding of the decision, and the follow-up plan.
- Is the coach allowing the employees to solve the problem, providing guidance only when necessary?

This exercise may be very difficult, both because of the size and nature of the role-play and because of the involvement of the other managers. You should remind the managers that when they comment on the role-play they should behave as coaches, not as judges.

Chapter 8. The Coach as Trainer

However training professionals may feel about having subject matter experts train employees, the fact remains that managers, either occasionally or often, will be helping their employees improve their current skills or develop new skills. This chapter helps them do it better.

It begins with guidelines for the coach as a trainer (pp. 93-97). As we reviewed the guidelines, I would ask for several examples of training that the managers in the group have provided their employees or that they have gotten from their managers in the past. We would apply the guidelines to these examples, using the following questions to focus:

- How would you make sure that you could do these tasks yourselves?
- How would you prepare to train your employees to do these tasks? How would you organize? Where and when would you train them? What materials and equipment would you need?
- How would you demonstrate these tasks?
- What results would you expect? What standards would you set?
- How would you deal with any failures?
- How would you react when your employees succeed?

The next section of Chapter 8, “Before, During, and After Training” (pp. 97-99), covers the same territory but for new hires. I would do a similar exercise, taking examples of training and guiding the managers through a discussion of how they would train new hires.

The next part of this chapter looks at training from the perspective of the learners (pp. 99-102). It’s followed by an outline of the ideal training session in five steps (p. 103). I would post the basics of this list up for display, as a background for the following exercise.

I would pick a manager from the group to serve as a trainer; the other managers in the group would be new hires. I would ask the trainer to choose a task or a series of tasks that would be essential for his or her employees. Then, I would ask the trainer to describe what he or she would do prior to meeting with the new hires to train them. I would ask questions as necessary, as if I were coaching a new manager in preparation for his or her first training intervention. After the trainer described how to prepare for the training, I would set aside and let him or her actually train the other managers. (This could be problematic if the tasks involve materials and equipment, but the trainer can be creative, using descriptions, gestures, and drawings to get the essential points across.)

I would run several demonstrations, depending on the time and the energy of the group. I would then review the section on pp. 103-104, “How Will You Know if It Worked?” The follow-up for this final section of the chapter would be simple, practical, and perhaps even fun.

I would ask each of the trainers, one by one, to stand and to choose several of his or her “new hires” to come forth and demonstrate the task that he or she had trained them to do, narrating their actions. The confidence that they show and their competence should provide ample evidence of the results of the training session.

Chapter 9. The Coach as Mentor

To build upon the general beginning of this chapter (pp. 105-107), I would ask for managers to talk about how managers from their past had served as mentors:

- What did the mentors do?
- How did they do it?
- What were the effects of what they did?

To work with the remaining sections of Chapter 9 (pp. 109-114), I would have the managers each take a sheet of paper and list at least five of their employees. Then, for each person listed, the manager should answer the following questions, jotting down any thoughts:

- In what way(s) could this person benefit from mentoring? In other words, what special talents could mentoring help develop or what problems could mentoring help remedy?
- Am I qualified to provide this mentoring?
- How would I approach this person?
- What reaction should I be prepared to handle, based on what I know about this person and the situation?
- What expectations and goals should we set?
- What can I do and what can I help this person to do to achieve those expectations and goals?

After the managers have answered those questions for their listed employees, urge them to take action on their thoughts about mentoring them. After all, they've already considered the possibilities and sketched out the plans.

Chapter 10. The Coach as Corrector

Managers may be able to avoid training and they can certainly avoid mentoring, but few managers can shirk their responsibility to correct inadequate performance and inappropriate behavior. This chapter presents principles for minimizing the conflict and discomfort of taking corrective action and making the action productive rather than punitive.

Before getting into this chapter, I would start by asking the managers to cite examples of employee performance or behavior that would merit corrective action. I would list their examples, keeping them general enough so as to apply in many environments.

To build on the heart of this chapter, the guidance provided on pp. 115-121, I would set up a role-play in which a manager takes corrective action with an employee. I would select a manager to play the manager and I would play the employee. (That's so I can show the various reactions that corrective action can provoke.) I would emphasize the following points, which I would display as a reminder:

- approach the employee
- state why the behavior need changing
- define the possible consequences
- ask a question that points toward a solution
- set expectations

We would do several role-plays, to cover at least two examples of inadequate performance and two examples of inappropriate behavior. After each role-play, I would encourage a discussion of what the manager had done and how the situation could have gone better. We would also discuss how the manager should monitor the results of the corrective action and what follow-up actions might be necessary.

Chapter 10 closes with "performance killers" (pp. 121-126). I would ask the managers for examples from their past, when an attempt at corrective action was hurt by a false judgment, a false solution, or avoidance. I would also ask them how the employee in question felt about the "performance killer" and how he or she reacted to the corrective action. Again, avoid the specifics and focus on the psychology involved in these examples.

Chapter 11. Coaching Land Mines

The bad examples with which you closed Chapter 10 lead naturally into Chapter 11, which covers various problems that can hinder coaching. For each of the types of problems presented here, I would ask the following questions:

- Why would this problem arise?
- Have you encountered problems of this type?

The main point would be that these problems occur—and not rarely. We're surrounded by examples, so we should be aware of them, understand what's involved, and then do what we can to reduce the problems that can keep us from coaching more effectively.

Chapter 12. Steps to Effective Coaching

The title of this chapter probably should have been something like “How to Delegate with Greater Confidence and Achieve Better Results.” The seven-step process presented here allows managers to help their employees function independently.

Since the steps of the process are presented through a fictitious scenario, it makes sense to build on the chapter by getting the managers to use the process to delegate real tasks—if only to their fellow managers. I would use the following role-play.

I choose two managers, one to play himself or herself and the other to play an employee. I ask the manager to select one of his or her routine tasks and go through the seven-step process with the employee. After each step (I would interrupt step 2 if the brainstorming went beyond two or three approaches), I would ask the other managers to comment on how well the manager handled that step as a coach and what he or she could have done better:

- naming the challenge and describing the outcome
- brainstorming possible approaches
- developing an action plan
- setting deadlines
- establishing criteria for evaluation
- facilitating action
- following through

I would emphasize that this process has three purposes: to help the employee function independently, to help the manager and the employee work as a team for better delegation and development, and to get something done. So, I would close this role-play by asking the other managers how successful they would consider the interaction in terms of those three objectives. That involves speculation, of course, but much of the interpersonal dynamics that they manage involve speculation.

If I had the time, I would do at least two or three of these role-plays. You can vary the scenario by using two or three employees rather than just one.

Chapter 13. Once More, with Feedback

I would start this chapter with a quick exercise. I would prepare a brief statement for each of the managers, something about one of his or her employees appropriate to his or her responsibilities and the type of organization. Here are some examples, based on what I would know about each manager in the group:

- “Janice, the monthly sales report comes out and you notice that George has just achieved a personal best in sales.”
- “Arturo, another manager tells you that she appreciates how Pat has been answering computer questions for employees in other divisions.”
- “Thomas, Clarissa turns in a report that you can present to your boss without making any changes—and your boss is very favorably impressed with her work.”

Then, to begin the session, I would choose a manager, read the statement prepared for him or her, gesture to another manager as the employee in question, and ask the manager to react. The manager should approach the employee and provide positive feedback. I would do this exercise with 10-15 managers; it should take only 30-45 seconds for each scenario, although probably longer at first.

We would then discuss these examples of feedback in terms of the points presented on pp. 149-154. I would then ask how many of the managers always or usually provided feedback of this sort to their employees. I would then make the point that providing positive feedback when an employee deserves it makes it easier to provide negative feedback when it's deserved.

The next two sections cover planning to deliver feedback (pp. 154-155) and delivering bad news (pp. 155-159). As we discuss one by one the seven points in the latter section, I would list them on the board. Then I would choose a manager to do a role-play with me as the employee. I would provide a generic situation, such as the following:

- The employee is having performance problems in recent weeks.
- The employee has gotten into several arguments this week.
- The employee has missed some deadlines in the last two weeks.
- The employee has shown up late several times this month.
- The employee came back from lunch inebriated.
- The employee has forgotten to finish several tasks over the past week.

I would invite the chosen manager to adapt the generic situation to his or her work environment. I would also ask him or her to describe and arrange the setting—to designate it as his or her office, the employee's workspace, a meeting room, or wherever—and to arrange the furniture appropriately. (This is basically improvisational theater, with the manager playing both director and lead actor.)

Why is it so difficult for most managers to give negative feedback? Because it's negative? Of course. But also because it can provoke reactions for which we cannot necessarily be completely

prepared. That's my role in this scenario: to react naturally and realistically to the criticism and the approach that the manager takes:

- to get defensive
- to blame others
- to deny the problem
- to break down and cry
- to become hostile
- to apologize profusely and make lots of promises
- to be impassive

I would do at least four or five of these role-plays. They should be difficult on the managers, because this is practice for the real thing. After each scenario, I would lead a discussion, based on the following questions and referring to the seven points on display (from pp. 155-159):

- Overall, how would you judge this meeting? Do you believe that it will resolve the problem?
- Did the manager select an appropriate environment? How was it appropriate or not?
- How did the manager begin the meeting? Any suggestions for improving the approach?
- Did the manager talk from common goals? How could he or she have done better?
- Did the manager offer reasons for providing negative feedback? How well?
- Did the manager speak to the needs of the employee? Did he or she find reasons for the employee to want to deal with the problem?
- Did the manager talk about actions, not motives, about behavior, not causes?
- Did the manager assume his or her fair share of responsibility for the problem? Was that part of the exchange credible?
- Did the manager provide choices, options, and opportunities? Did he or she seem sincere and open?
- How did the manager react to the various reactions of the employee?

How we do something can be as important as what we do. That's certainly the case when a manager provides negative feedback. So the discussion would cover the attitude and tone of the manager. But I would keep it from turning into a theatrical review, since these are managers, not actors, and this is a training session, not real life. But I would stress the importance of being real, being human, and not losing composure.

Chapter 14. Coaching by Rewarding

This chapter returns to the subject of Chapter 3, the basic question for a coach: “What Do Your Players Want?” To be effective, a manager should understand what motivates his or her employees—not just to get them to perform, but also to reward them when they do.

Chapter 3 examined three basic types of motivation: the need to achieve, the burn to learn, and the craving to contribute (pp. 31-35). I would briefly review these three drives before getting into Chapter 14.

This chapter covers the three basic types of reward: tangible, symbolic, and intangible. As we discuss each of these three, I would put the three terms across the top of the board. Then, I would ask the managers to mention the various rewards that they and their fellow managers use. For each reward mentioned, I would ask the group to decide whether it was tangible or symbolic or intangible. I would then list it under the appropriate heading. They might not all agree on a category; if not, I would list the reward in question under both or even all three choices. The point is not to decide or reach consensus but to provoke thinking about the nature of rewards and how employees might perceive them.

After the managers have filled the board with their rewards, I would move on to the next part of the exercise, which would relate the rewards on display with the three types of motivation described in Chapter 3. I would ask the managers the following three questions, covering each completely before taking on the next:

- Which of these rewards might be appropriate for an employee motivated by the need to achieve?
- Which of these rewards might be appropriate for an employee motivated by the burn to learn?
- Which of these rewards might be appropriate for an employee motivated by the burn to learn?

Again, the point is not for the managers to agree but for them to realize that there is no reward that will be right for all of their employees and that they have many possibilities for rewarding each employee more appropriately. I would encourage the managers to jot down all of the rewards that might work in their specific situation.

The final section of Chapter 14 (pp. 167-168) is short but very important. I would ask the managers in the group to share the ways in which they act as cheerleaders for their employees. They should emerge from this discussion with ideas and enthusiasm to put them to work.

Chapter 15. Bonus Principles for Good Coaching (and Good Living)

This chapter closes the book by opening up into how we live. Depending on your managers and on your objectives for the training session, you can focus your discussion of these principles on coaching or you can let it develop more generally.

I would start discussion of each of the 13 principles presented here with two basic questions:

- Can you cite situations when this principle provided valuable guidance?
- Can you cite situations when this principle resulted in negative consequences or when ignoring it worked out well?

A principle is a general statement and we all know the comment (attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, George Bernard Shaw, and Mark Twain), “No generalization is worth a damn—including this one.” I would want the managers in my training session to appreciate that principles provide guidance, but no guarantees.