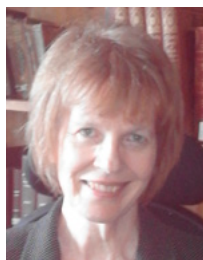


Coaching skills for managers

How to manage relationships and effect change



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Introduction

I have been interested in leadership, coaching and mentoring for many years in the context of developing and supporting leaders and managers and working with teams. I am now an internal coach at Bangor University, and I mentor as part of the Women in Universities Mentoring Scheme. I have found from experience that mentoring and coaching are excellent and effective means of implementing change and improving understanding and performance in leadership, learning and development in libraries and organisations. I would like to acknowledge the fantastic work of Mari Ellis Roberts, Training and Development Officer in Human Resources at Bangor, who put together the coaching skills programme referred to in this article.

At Bangor University, we run a suite of workshops for managers, including the Institute of Leadership and Management's Effective Managers and Developing Supervisory Skills programmes. These are supplemented by action learning and psychometric tools such as MTQ48 (Mental Toughness Questionnaire), MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), 16PF (Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire); all programmes now include an element of coaching. There is a two-pronged approach to developing a coaching network in the university by:

- Supporting the development of staff wishing to undertake a coaching qualification, which is generally funded by individual colleges and departments. We now have a small team of qualified internal coaches in Bangor.
- By assisting (through the Human Resources department) in sourcing or referring potential coaches for training and referring the people being coached to the coaches. We have set up a coaching network and supervision to support coaches.

The Human Resources department is currently putting together a new strategy, which will include examining how a coaching culture can be further adopted across the university.

Coaching skills for managers pilot

Whilst coaching is carried out across the university, the library wanted a less structured approach, in order to be able to use coaching skills for managers as a style of management and leadership. This initiative followed on from a major restructure in 2013–14, when we implemented a change management programme across the service. We decided we needed to address further some issues of management styles, empowerment, attitudes and behaviours and culture. In order to develop an awareness of coaching and how it could be used in the service, Mari Ellis Roberts devised the programme and we started to implement a 'Developing coaching skills for managers' programme.

We piloted the programme in the library. To date all managers and supervisors in the Library and Archives Service have undertaken the training. It was felt that it was key to the success of this programme that the Director of Service (me) is a coach and supports the development of a coaching culture and style of working.

How we did it

Coaching Skills for Managers was run as a one-day workshop and was followed by a half-day workshop six months later to measure practical skills and give managers the opportunity to explore difficulties and how to overcome them. Coaching with a member of the pool of internal coaches was offered to each manager on a one-to-one basis.

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The programme focused on the knowledge and skills needed in order to use the coaching style with colleagues, staff and others. Participants explored the appropriateness of coaching in different situations. Informal coaching was advocated as a style of management that encourages staff to participate in the decision-making process, and to make decisions they trust; it encourages a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Format of the programme

In order to set the scene, the distinction between coaching and mentoring was examined, along with the advantages and disadvantages of coaching for the individual manager, the person being coached and the organisation. The application of coaching skills by managers in the workplace was also discussed, and it acknowledged that there will obviously be times when coaching is not appropriate. The following questions were raised and discussed:

- When is it appropriate and when is it not?
- What will be different?
- What will be difficult for you?
- Why is it an investment?

The skills development focused heavily on the following:

- Listening, questioning, reflecting and summarising. This takes a large proportion of the session and is based on practical activities and practising the skills.
- Communication – tone, body language, types of questions

During the full-day session, demonstration videos were used. One was from Videoarts; another was developed internally to demonstrate the GROW Model – i.e. goals, reality, options and will. It was developed by Sir John Whitmore and provides an excellent framework and structure to guide the coach. It includes actions that are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant and time-bound). Further information can be found at: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_89.htm

The group briefly explored other coaching models, but focused mainly on the GROW model. The best advice was to keep it simple at this stage. The importance of self-awareness and having an appreciation of different perspectives was explored. Fundamental to the role of coach is the ability to get the person being coached to consider situations from different perspectives before deciding on the way forward.

Emotional intelligence, personal iceberg (Bom 1992), Johari's Window (Businessballs 2016) and setting SMART objectives were touched upon so that participants had several tools at their disposal. These are standard on most managerial courses.

Practical coaching

The latter part of the session was dedicated to practising coaching in groups of three: participants took the role of coach, person being coached, and observer by turn. They were encouraged to use the GROW model; handouts contained examples of coaching questions. The observer ensured that the session did not overrun fifteen minutes; up to ten minutes were allowed for feedback within the group; this was then summarised in the plenary.

Issues to address

It is important to be mindful of the potential of coaching overkill. It is an excellent communication style, but using it when it is not appropriate can in

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itself lead to problems. When appropriate, staff will expect guidance direction and leadership. Coaching should not detract from, and does not take away, the need for addressing performance issues.

Feedback from managers during the second half of the programme

Sometimes managers were apprehensive, saying 'I don't have time to coach'. For the majority of managers, coaching is a 'style' to be used as part of their daily work and as a way of communicating. It is an investment that will ultimately save time as staff start to solve their own problems creatively.

'I'm not an expert'. You don't need to be an expert or a trained coach to begin to develop a coaching style of management. Coaching has more to do with managing a relationship.

I have seen several changes in working practices, with staff working more collaboratively and creatively, and with a greater sense of empowerment. Some staff have progressed in leaps and bounds and have made great progress. I wholeheartedly recommend this style of management and working.

Next steps

The Coaching Skills for Managers programme is being implemented across other areas of the university now, and feedback is being sought on changes in staff development. The university also rolled out a pilot coaching service during 2015–16, drawing on the small pool of qualified coaches on site. The particular staff groups targeted for this are early career researchers, supervisors and managers currently attending management development programmes, or those who have attended such a programme in the past twelve months.

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