

Take the coach approach

In the voluntary and public sectors, we face increasingly demanding challenges. Greater competition. Tighter regulation. Shrinking budgets. Higher expectations. Never-ending change. But one of the oldest challenges of all remains the most pressing concern for many of the managers we work with: *how do I get my staff to give their best?* Which is another way of asking *how do I get to be a good manager?*

'Management' often demonstrates itself in 'conversations' in the form of 1₂1s or supervisions. Two people – manager and staff – talking about what's happened in the past and what needs to happen in the future. *Good* management is demonstrated in the *quality* of those conversations. A clear, focused, constructive 1₂1 with an individual about what they've done well and less well, what still needs doing and how it needs to be done, will take that person immeasurably further than a full-colour Gantt chart of desired outputs.

A coaching approach to management – integrating the principles of coaching into the nitty-gritty, day-to-day business of managing staff – can transform performance. Alongside core skills such as questioning, listening, generating awareness, and giving feedback, the coaching approach to management provides a structure to our conversations with staff. Two helpful frameworks, created by =mc are the FORCES and STEPS models outlined below.

Rescuers, Gurus and Coaches

Imagine this scenario. You've asked one of your team, Andrew, to get help from another department for a project. Andrew comes back to you and says: "Anne has said no – can you have a go at speaking to her?"

Here are two typical responses:

- (1) "OK, leave it with me and I'll deal with it later."
- (2) "Drop Anne a polite but firm email – don't call – explaining this is one of the corporate goals we agreed so they need to make the time to help."

Either of these responses *could* be appropriate. The problem comes when you find you are defaulting to one or other approach on a regular basis.

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Response (1) is the *Rescuer*. Rescuers are very busy managers – the work they delegate to their team often finds its way right back to their own in-tray. They abound in the voluntary sector where ‘helping’ others – including their own team – is embedded in the culture. The problem, though, is that they can end up spending more time doing other people’s work than their own.

Response (2) is the *Guru*. Gurus relish any opportunity to share their wisdom and instruct those around them on how they should go about their job. Ask them a question, and they’ll give you an answer; present them with a problem, and they’ll give you a solution. The risk here is that they don’t actually understand the problem. And even if they do, a culture of dependency quickly flourishes, and staff fail to take risks, think for themselves or take ownership of their work.

The *Coach* approach is different. Managers who coach refuse to take on their team’s work (unless or until it’s necessary). Nor do they serve up a solution on a plate. Their message to the team is: “I’m available to help you, but I expect you to do what you can.” They’d more than likely use the FORCE.

Use the FORCE!

The FORCES model provides a framework within which we can coach staff to greater levels of performance. The model outlines six stages to any manager-staff conversation focused on solving problems or increasing staff effectiveness. Giving your conversation a structure like this greatly improves the chance of:

- determining what the issue actually is
- staying on track with the discussion
- remaining solution-oriented
- getting to a good result more quickly and effectively than you would by just ‘chatting’
- ensuring that conversations convert to actions
- developing a culture of ‘completed staff work’: an understanding that staff are expected to get as far as they can with their work before you take ownership of it

The six stages of the model are shown here, together with a sample coaching question for each stage:

Focus	What exactly is the issue?
Outcome	What would be a good result for us?
Reality	What's happened so far?
Create	What possible solutions can you think of?
Evaluate	What's the best solution?
STEPS	What are you going to do next?

Always agree STEPS

The STEPS model links directly to the end of the FORCES model and is designed to help the manager and staff to be clear about what action needs to be taken. It also incorporates an accountability step, ensuring that the manager knows what to expect and when by way of an update.

Specific	What specifically are you going to do?
Time	When will you start? When will you finish?
Elements	What are the key elements of your action plan? (What are your main actions? Who are you going to involve? What resources will you need?)
Progress	How will you keep me posted?
Success	How will we know that you've achieved a good result?

We can see that the manager's approach in these models is, as much as possible, to keep the responsibility for the issue firmly with their staff. The manager's role is to provide an environment within which the staff member can think through their job and then do it. It's *not* the manager's job to be either a *Rescuer* or a *Guru*.

Being an effective manager-coach involves:

- honing the core skills of coaching
- integrating them effectively into an appropriate structure
- knowing when it is appropriate to use coaching skills and structures

It often requires a change of mindset, a change in approach, and sometimes a change to career-long habits. Managing through coaching is a challenging but immensely rewarding journey.

Further help

If you would like to know more about integrating coaching into your management toolkit, contact our practice manager, Moi Tu, to arrange some in-house training for your team:

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