
5 coaching myths and a 5-step coaching reality check

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What is good coaching? And who should be coached? Professor Randall S Peterson busts five coaching myths and shares a framework for leaders to follow



I hear many wrong assumptions about coaching. The most prominent being that “coaching my team is the right thing to do”. Leaders coach because they think that morally, they should.

The appraisal systems that manage performance typify how wrong our perceptions of the topic can be. How many times have you emotionally supported a colleague? Admittedly, it depends on your level of self-awareness, but the answer is unlikely to be never. And how often is the time invested recorded and measured in a performance review? Here, the answer is more likely to be never. And yet, all global organisations want employees who are willing to support and develop their fellow workers.

Companies have a long way to go before they value – in a way that’s measured and rewarded – the benefits of a leader who coaches effectively. Leadership is about having the courage to be yourself, the willingness to put yourself at risk when you are needed by your group, and the ability to harness your position, power and insights in order to unleash the full potential of the people you lead. This, in part, is being a coach.

Performance is a function of both ability and motivation. A coach is engaged to improve both. Here are some of the myths that stand in the way.

1. It’s the right thing to do

Certainly, it’s the right thing to do. But not in the name of ethics or guilt. You should always be focused on what you can do to improve the performance of your team. The key driver should be in the connection between a high-performing team and the organisational goals. Coaching is not a technique. It’s not something to be switched on. It’s the cornerstone of teamwork. It can help to tackle conflict constructively, it can help us all to learn, develop, grow and improve.

What defines an effective team? Their level of output should be high. The individual members must be satisfied and engaged, and the dynamics of the team should be viable over time. Together, this creates a strong business case. When you attract, retain and motivate good people, you improve the bottom line. Research shows that engaged employees are 44% more likely to stay in their jobs and 50% more productive.

2. It's only for problem people

Actually, coaching is for helping high potential and average people get even better. It's about making sure the right people get the right opportunities, and allowing others to give them the necessary feedback rather than necessarily giving the feedback itself.

There are studies to demonstrate that you are better off focusing your time on the competent players who have fewer flaws, or would benefit from exposure to new ideas and experiences. The personal case for warranting an investment in time is significant. By coaching your competent people you, a) build a stronger team, b) become a magnet for talent, and significantly c) build a network of supporters who build your reputation and quite possibly can open doors for you later in your career. Moreover, if you invest your time in team members who lack ability and have more shortcomings, you're in danger of slashing time that could be better spent nurturing the rising stars. The brightest, sometimes most difficult workers, tend to leave good organisations for better ones – coaching is an opportunity to inspire them to stay working with you for longer.

3. It's about making your team happy

Coaching helps to motivate teams. But motivation is different from satisfaction – over 50 years of research has consistently found no link between the two. Being happy on the job is not linked to the quality of an individual's performance. Satisfaction does, however, have a negative relationship with absenteeism and turnover. This means that happy workers spend more time working and stay in the job longer, which helps to reduce the costs associated with turnover. Does this mean that being happy motivates people to work more hours? Or do people who spend more time at work and achieve more, simply feel happier? To find out, you need to understand what motivates your team. Existing research suggests the most important motivational levers to pull include:

- The job design: can you tailor jobs to fit specific individuals and their preferences?
- Training: what skills do people need or want?
- Participation in decision making: can you involve members in group decisions?
- Strong selection: do members respect, value or even admire their teammates and want to work with them?

To uncover the answers, you need to be a coach.

4. It takes a psychotherapist to coach a team

In truth, all good managers have to think a little like a psychologist to unpick each individual's potential. But, as a leader, you don't have to fix people's childhood, deep-seated or personal problems. Your concern is with their current work behaviours, actions and results. Coaching involves orchestrating development and performance improvement within the organisation. It doesn't necessarily mean counselling them, giving detailed feedback or even teaching them yourself. It's your job to empower people with development opportunities.

That said, it's wrong to assume that personal life belongs at home. [Research shows](#) that employees want to be the same people at work as they are at home. It makes more sense to embrace home with work to foster authentic workers. If you take this approach, you're more likely to experience long-lasting benefits to your personal brand. As you hopefully climb higher in your profession, the people you once coached will form a trusted network that will support you in the upper-echelons of your career.

5. Some performance issues are not coachable

At one level this one is true. There are some deep-rooted issues that coaching cannot fix. However, great leaders can influence their people to compensate for their flaws. For instance, some members might struggle to see the world from other people's perspectives. As a coach, it's your job to ask the right questions that lead followers to see alternative perspectives. Constructive dialogues instigated by you as the coach should improve difficult situations.

A strong leader can also help reframe the mindset of change blockers – who, though loyal to the organisation, can be detrimental to progress. This habit is often caused by a fear of risk, a negative self-image or generally poor self-esteem. You must find out what they fear – it's likely to be that change could harm the organisation, and therefore their own personal security – then, address how to upend fear and instead, highlight the opportunity. Other members may also have fears. Fear of shame for example can cause people to rush into new ideas because they feel pressure from a high-achieving culture. Others might intimidate and alienate the

group: the question is why? It's your job to ask, and show them the impact of their bad habits and why they're worth breaking.

In each case, evaluate the problem behaviour and then work out how bad it is – is it worth your time? If you don't want to lose your star performers then put the following coaching techniques into practice.

5 steps to coaching

Use the acronym BIGER to coach your team

1. Build trust – get people working with you not against you
2. Inspire commitment – get people working on goals that matter
3. Grow skills – get people focused on what's required. What's the new skill? The next two steps are interconnected.
4. Encourage persistence – get them to support one another. Learning a new skill can be hard and it can get worse before it gets better
5. Re-shape the environment – get your team to buy into a culture of coaching.

Remove barriers and reward learning.

Follow these steps and crush outdated myths. Coaching should be the centrepiece to your approach to management. After all, being a coach is a tangible way to get results