

How to cultivate a coaching approach to support team members

 By [Anja van Beek](#)

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Over the years, the role of a leader and manager of teams has evolved. It is no longer a command and control scenario, where you give instructions and your team will follow.



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The pandemic has fast-tracked an agile and empowerment approach. Leaders need to be adaptive problem-solvers. This is due to the uncertainty and pressure over the past couple of weeks and months – there were no clear and obvious answers to issues and challenges, and leaders did not have the luxury of telling their teams what to do. They had to be adaptive and guide them to figure it out for themselves.

Many have experienced the benefit of empowering individuals through a coaching approach. I often get the question of what is the best approach to switching to a coaching-model. The following steps will support you:

Step 1: Be clear on why you want to adopt this approach

For many managers, the transition to a coach isn't easy. In fact, some coaching traits are at odds with what is seen as managerial strengths. If you are not convinced that coaching is the right approach, schedule a session with a coach yourself. Once you have personally experienced the power of coaching, you will find it easier to shift from a managerial role to a coaching mindset.

Step 2: Understand what coaching is not

Coaching and mentoring are often confused. In mentoring, the leader shares his/her experience and expertise through storytelling and discussions. With teaching, the team member is lacking knowledge in a specific area. The leader can teach by clearly explaining the concept/topic, answer the relevant questions and verify that the team member is comfortable with the new knowledge. Switch back into the coaching role by asking "How will this new knowledge affect your future actions?"

What is the role of the team member in this? Coaching is a journey and you begin with the end in mind.

The team member must take responsibility and be committed to achieving their goals. The leader can provide the framework for exploring but ultimately the team member has to take ownership of the outcome. Be very clear on the objectives and goals they want to achieve and how you will support them in your various roles as a leader.

Step 3: Over-invest in skills

Great coaches aren't born; they're made through dedication, commitment, and practice. Core coaching skills such as active listening, questioning, observing, building rapport, empathy, supportive encouragement and holding others accountable are all skills to be taught.

Step 4: Use this cheat sheet to jump-start the conversation

- *If we had no vested interest in this, how would you look at it?*
- *What's another side we haven't yet considered?*
- *What's the real challenge here?*
- *What if we could implement any solution, what would we go for?*
- *If you're saying 'yes' to this, what are you saying 'no' to?*
- *What questions would guide this situation to a positive outcome?*
- *If money were no problem, what would we do?*
- *How would our customers see this?*

Step 5: Listen to what they are not saying

Be attentive and pay specific attention to the non-verbal cues. For example, the tone of voice or the body language. This is often saying something vastly different (and more honest) than verbal communication.

In a remote / virtual world, it is a bit challenging to connect with another person, but it isn't impossible. Have a look at patterns of switching off the webcam during team meetings, are they responding to request to give input in the chat pad, do they respond by using the "responsive tools" at all?

Step 6: It is about persistence, not perfection

When we start with something new and we are outside our comfort zone, we learn and grow the most. Don't get discouraged if you fall into your old habits of managing the team.

Rather be on the lookout for patterns and cues when you're not in a coaching mode. Ask the question if this is with a specific team member only or a specific area of work? By looking at these cues you might find a pattern of insight and realise what clues to look out for and change your future approach.

Step 7: The secret sauce is not to give advice

Coaching and advising are conflicting activities. The role of a leader as a coach is always neutral and unbiased. When giving advice or making a recommendation, it goes hand-in-hand with taking responsibility for the advice given. A better approach can be to leave the responsibility with the team member by asking or suggesting “Could this be a possibility for you?” or “Another approach worth exploring is...” This tends to signal that it is their call to come up with the solution and to be accountable for their decision.

The most important aspect in the role of a coach, is to consider **how you are showing up during the conversation**. Are you judging the employee's actions, lack of experience or diverse views? Do you want to force your opinion, or do you allow the team member to find their solutions even if it might be different to your own views? It is a 40/60 split between what you are *doing* and who you are *being* in these discussions.

By taking the initiative and proactively working to become a better coach, you will elevate not only your own performance, but that of your team, and by extension, your organisation.

ABOUT ANJA VAN BEEK

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