



The coaching manager

Effectively lead behavioral change in your teams



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Our sources

This synopsis is based on the publications presented below and on the back page.

Coaching Leaders
Daniel White, Jossey-Bass,
2006, 312 pages.

Leadership de transition
Alain Cardon, Les Éditions d'Organisation,
2005, 199 pages.

Coaching is an important part of the job of any manager. Managers are expected not only to make decisions, organize and coordinate people, but they must also support the development of their subordinates. To do this, they must provide feedback on performance and make people aware of inappropriate attitudes – reticence to delegate, tense interpersonal relationships with coworkers, etc. – in order to help them behave differently.

Now, getting people to change the way they work and act is no easy task. Simply dictating behavioral change is rarely effective. A shy employee ordered to participate more actively in meetings, for example, will continue to be intimidated by the context and won't be any better equipped to speak before an audience. To improve in this domain, the concerned individual must first be aware that he or she behaves inappropriately, decide to change, understand the new behavior that he or she must adopt, and then work to make the required changes. This is often a lengthy and painful process, during which the employee must be able to count on managerial support.

The publications that we have selected provide valuable tips for managers on how to coach their employees and manage change. Four key messages in particular are emphasized:

- **Make the concerned employee aware of the issue in order to stimulate an inner desire to change.**
- **Help the employee understand the root causes of his or her behavior, in order to identify effective ways to change it.**
- **Build a coaching plan that will gradually get the employee to develop new behaviors.**
- **Maintain the employee's motivation to change throughout the process.**

In this synopsis...

- 1 A key **managerial role**
- 2 Stimulate the **desire to change**
- 3 Help the person **understand his or her behavior**
- 4 Organize **learning**
- 5 Maintain **motivation**

1 A key managerial role

Helping employees change and improve is a key managerial responsibility. Good managers must therefore not only share their know-how and experience, but also concern themselves with the behavior of their subordinates. Whether it's a matter of training a young recruit to facilitate meetings, teaching a recent promote to assume management responsibilities, or generally helping a subordinate work more effectively, managers are frequently required to help employees rectify unsuitable behavior and acquire attitudes that will make them more successful.

Many managers believe that it is sufficient to point out what their subordinates are doing wrong, and ask them to improve, e.g. *"I noticed that you tend to monopolize the conversation in meetings. You should let others speak more and listen to what they have to say,"* or *"Your presentations are a bit weak. I want you to spend more time preparing beforehand."* Etc. These directives are sufficient when the required change is minor or purely technical in nature. However, some changes come up against deeply-embedded personality characteristics, in which case, much more support is needed. For example, take the head of a sales department recognized for his skills, but who was frequently chastised for his inability to control his temper. Only after months of great personal effort with the help of his boss and a professional coach

did the manager manage to modify his behavior, to the great relief of his colleagues and much to the benefit of his career.

Helping a subordinate break deeply ingrained habits is thus a real managerial challenge. Several obstacles make this task particularly difficult:

A long and complex process

People don't instantly unlearn a given behavior and replace it with another. They must go through a succession of specific phases, all difficult. For example, to become accustomed to delegating, people must first become aware of their tendency to try to do everything themselves. They must then be convinced that relying on others at times would be more efficient. Third, they must gradually overcome their natural reticence to put this concept into practice. Finally, they must get used to delegating every day, on a routine basis. At each step in the process, the person's manager must be able to modulate support depending on the obstacles encountered – a delicate task requiring good interpersonal skills, a keen sense of observation and the flexibility to adapt to circumstances.

Powerful resistance to change

No one likes to change – especially when change involves fundamental aspects of the personality. Many people react badly when their behavior is pointed out as being a problem, and

generally find good reasons to justify it. For example, a project manager at a consulting firm faced with employee complaints concerning his tendency to work systematically under pressure long retorted that a consultant is supposed to be responsive. He firmly held this conviction until he was shown

Employees often need help to modify firmly entrenched behaviors.

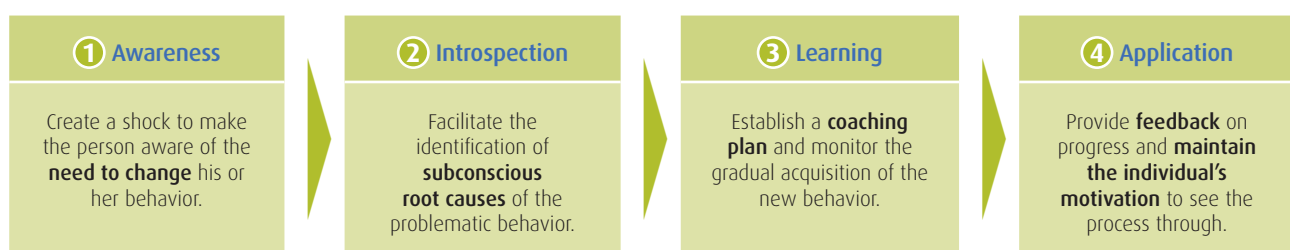
that his colleagues somehow managed to organize their work better than he did. Moreover, even after deciding to change, old reflexes die hard. Despite real efforts to be more organized, this project manager regularly continued to hold last-minute meetings the day before a presentation to "fine-tune the details." A coach must therefore be very patient when accompanying this type of change, where nothing can be taken for granted and the risk of failure is great.

A delicate managerial position

Managers who help their subordinates change their behavior are like football coaches who can provide only advice and encouragement from the sidelines, without getting personally involved in the game. This situation is often experienced as frustrating – especially for those who like to be proactive, as is often true for managers. For exam-

FIGURE A The four steps of coaching

One of the main difficulties in being a coaching manager is that the kind of help or advice given must be adapted according to the phase of the change process in which the employee finds him or herself.



ple, a service company branch manager tried to "show the way" to a department head whom he felt was not efficient in organizing field staff activities. After failing in this effort on several occasions, he chose a less direct approach. Having observed that the department head saw himself as a technician whose role was to provide hands-on support if needed, he undertook to modify this belief. Through dialogue, he successfully made this individual aware that he was also supposed to be an organizer. This approach was successful in getting him to cross a psychological barrier, and was therefore more effective than previous initiatives. In the end, the department head became much more open to the idea of learning to plan more efficiently.

The publications that we have selected show how to address this managerial challenge. They point out that to be successful, coaching must simultaneously take account of the psychological and the practical dimension of behavioral change, articulated around four steps (Figure A):

- Motivate the person to change;
- Help the person understand the root causes of his or her current behavior;

- Organize ways to help the person learn new behavioral patterns;
- Continuously maintain the person's drive to complete the process.

2 Stimulate the desire to change

People rarely relish the thought of conducting the introspection required to change deeply entrenched behavioral patterns. The first step for managers is therefore to trigger an awareness that will push the individual to take action.

Provide feedback that will motivate an individual to change

Very often, people are not aware of the problems posed by their behavior. The role of the coach is to open their eyes, for example, by showing them what other people have to say about it or the results of 360° assessments. For instance, the head of a pharmaceutical research laboratory was persuaded that the employee turnover in his department was on average for such organizations. It is only when he learned from

the HR director that his turnover was three times higher than average, and that most of those who quit complained they weren't given sufficient autonomy, that he understood that he really had to solve

The desire to behave differently is rarely spontaneous.

his delegation problem. The way this information is conveyed is nonetheless extremely important, in order to avoid triggering negative side effects like rejection, discouragement, etc. (Figure B).

Present change as a learning process

Most people do not like to admit that their behavior is inappropriate, especially since negative behavior is often the dark side of a quality (Figure C). On the other hand, they generally agree that learning to work more efficiently would be a good thing. Change should therefore be presented as a means to develop rather than to correct a flaw. A marketing manager, for example, agreed to work with his boss to improve

FIGURE B Create an acceptable shock

People must be confronted with the negative consequences of their behavior to find the motivation to change. However, this experience must not be so shocking as to trigger rejection. Three defensive mechanisms are often encountered in this situation:

DEFENSIVE MECHANISM	SYMPTOM	ATTITUDES TO ADOPT
Denial	"There is no problem," "There is a misunderstanding," "The proof or evidence you are showing me is not objective, is meaningless," etc.	• Demonstrate your point with proof that is as incontestable as possible, using different types of evidence all pointing to the same conclusion, if possible.
Passing the buck	I don't have a problem; the ones with the problem are those who are criticizing me." "My job forces me to act this way." "I'm being victimized," etc.	• Avoid an accusatory tone and over-dramatization. • Present the situation as the starting point for improvement, rather than as a failure. • Support your presentation with elements of comparison with other people in the same situation, but who behave differently with better results.
Shame	"You are right; I'm really not competent," "I'm doing my best, I can't do any better," "That's just the way I am; I can't do anything about it," etc.	• Also point out the positive side of the behavior. • Don't emphasize the most painful or embarrassing aspects of the observation. • Refrain from judging the person. Stick to the facts. • Emphasize that you are there to help and that improvement is absolutely possible.

the efficiency and creativity of the marketing department – and accepted to rethink his management methods completely. He would have undoubtedly been less enthusiastic had he been told right off the bat that his lack of organization could no longer be tolerated.

Propose objectives in line with the person's values

People are more inclined to change if they feel they will personally benefit from their efforts. Individual motives must therefore be taken carefully into account when formulating objectives. A financial analyst known for his intellectual qualities had a lot of trouble admitting that some people act irrationally, based on their feelings. He couldn't stand emotional people and didn't understand why he should behave differently toward them. One day his human resource director offered to introduce him to behavioral psychology. Happy to have a scientific tool to understand something that had long baffled him, he dove in enthusiastically and rapidly improved his ability to communicate as a result. In the same

spirit, offering to help improve the performance of the team of a manager who cares about doing well is generally more productive than ordering him or her to be less domineering and brusque with his or her team members.

Draw lessons from successful changes in the past

"I'll never make it" is one of the most common arguments against trying to change undesirable behavior. To overcome this obstacle, it is often useful to explore the person's past to find other instances of successful change, e.g. learning a new job, leading a difficult project, etc. Personal successes obtained in the past – e.g. stopped smoking, lost weight – can also be valuable arguments.

3 Help the person understand his or her behavior

If people do not understand the deep reasons that they behave as they do, they cannot take effective action

to counter that behavior. At best, they will be able to control themselves when circumstances are favorable, but their old habits will rapidly resurge when things get tense. People must therefore be made aware of their mental models (Figure D).

Analyze the mental models behind behavior

Behavior results primarily from the way people have learned to see the world – known as their "mental models" (Figure E). When an individual understands the model that underlies undesirable behavior, he or she can change it more easily. Two types of mental models in particular must be brought to light:

- **Convictions.**

The conclusions that people draw from their past experiences influence their behavior – with more or less fortunate consequences. They must be made conscious of the relative nature of their beliefs. For example, the manager of a major publishing firm rarely ate lunch with his colleagues and hesitated to

FIGURE C The other side of the coin

Many people have difficulty recognizing the problematic nature of their behaviors because their flaws are often the dark side of a quality that they are proud of and legitimately want to emphasize, for example:

Quality	Induced Flaw
Powerful intellect	Intolerance and difficulty communicating with people who are slower to understand.
Ability to make decisions quickly	Tendency to give opinions on everything and decide for others.
Enthusiasm, empathy, good interpersonal relationship skills	Tendency to give opinions on everything and decide for others.
Professional discipline, concern for detail	Rigidity, perceived to be too demanding
Etc.	Etc.

Two principles to follow by the manager in discussions with the concerned individual:

- 1 When pointing out the problem caused by the behavior, also **emphasize the corresponding quality**. Otherwise, the person will probably find the opinion to be biased and unfair.
- 2 **Concretely** show how the quality becomes a flaw when pushed to a certain extreme, e.g. "You don't want curb the initiatives of your subordinates. That's good. But at recent client presentations, you hardly spoke a word and your subordinates had to conduct the entire discussion. The client is wondering whether you have the leadership needed for this job."

have social conversations with them, isolating himself in the organization. After speaking with his manager, he finally realized that this behavior was linked to the memory of his first job at a company where people pretended to be friendly while stabbing each other in the back. He had subconsciously concluded that it was dangerous to interact socially in professional settings.

- **Values.**

Helping people reflect upon what they believe is important can be extremely productive. After speaking with her boss, one manager realized that she attached a great deal of importance to visible signs of recognition, e.g. promotions, raises, etc. Once these values were made explicit, she was able to decide whether or not they were well founded. For instance, she realized that professional life could be rewarded in ways other than money or power. She volunteered to participate in task forces, enrolled in night classes in a neighboring university, etc. Her colleagues unanimously agreed that her behavior became much less aggressive as a result.

Make people aware of their feelings

Emotions have a powerful impact on behavior. People therefore need to become aware of what they are feeling when they exhibit a behavior that is causing a problem. For example, the IT director of a trading firm

Deep change requires getting to the root of problematic behavior.

recognized that he tended to lose his temper because he was afraid of failing. Recognizing his fear was a first step. Once he understood the reason for his behavior, he was better prepared to control his reactions.

Think in terms of personality facets

Analyzing people's behavior as the result of one facet of their personality can often be useful. An individual can then be asked to behave more appropriately based on other aspects of their nature. The research director of a bio-

technology firm used this technique to stop cataloging as stupid anyone who did not share his point of view. With the help of a coach, he called this tendency his "inner judge." To counter this habit, he started calling upon another aspect of his personality, known as his "inner explorer," which his numerous successes in the scientific domain had proven to be equally powerful. In this way, he was able to become a much better listener and much more tolerant of the ideas of others.

4 Organize learning

Unlearning a deeply ingrained habit and replacing it with another takes more than a day. To maximize the chances of success, the coaching manager must lay out a step-by-step program taking account of both the psychological and the technical dimensions of learning.

Offer alternative mental models

Learning a new behavior begins in the head. Before starting to practice new behaviors, managers must help

FIGURE D The art of questioning

Asking the right questions at the right time is one of the key skills that the coaching manager must master. A difficult art to master – especially in a culture that rewards affirmativeness, as is the case at most companies. A few tips can come in handy:

• Through your questions, try to win and reinforce the person's trust and confidence.	• Reassure the person about the objective you are pursuing: The point is not to find fault with the person, but help him or her understand the reasons for his or her behavior. • Demonstrate empathy: Friendly posture, non-aggressive gestures, calm tone of voice, pace of speech not too rapid, frequent reformulation of answers to show you're listening, etc. • Don't exhaust the person. Several short conversations are more effective than firing a long list of questions at the person for an entire afternoon.
• Ensure that your questions teach the person something.	• Push the person out of his or her comfort zone. Offer new perspectives that may never have occurred to him or her before. • Share information. The other person will be grateful and will be more open as a result. • Encourage the person to ask you questions in return. The discussion will be more balanced and you will understand the person's doubts and concerns better.
• Avoid influencing responses. Otherwise, the person will feel manipulated or pushed.	• Use open questions, particularly at the beginning of the conversation, e.g. "What do you think about how your department operates?" is better than "Don't you have the feeling that things aren't run very well?" • Don't pass judgment. Your objective is to understand the other person's mindset, not to convince him or her that you have understood what the problem is. • Don't over-plan your questions. You will give the other person the impression that you have a preconceived notion of what he or she was going to say. Instead, use what the person says as a springboard to formulate further questions.

their employees create mental models that push them in the right direction. For example, a sales department manager was convinced of the importance of forming a friendly rapport with his

The person coached must gradually learn to master the new behavior.

team. This mindset created powerful empathy, but was counterproductive when the company was forced to restructure. With the help of his boss, this manager gradually understood that his job sometimes involved conveying unpleasant messages and being disliked. Once he got used to this idea, he found it easier to adopt the requisite behaviors.

Establish a coaching plan

In business, as in sports or the arts, practice makes perfect. Managers must therefore serve as real coaches, helping employees define the behaviors they want to adopt in the future, and then allowing them to practice. The efficiency of coaching initiatives can

be reinforced by applying two recommendations in particular:

- **Propose simulation exercises.**

Practical exercises are most effective when they are as similar as possible to the real-life situations that the concerned individual is likely to face. For example, if someone needs to practice delegating, he or she could rehearse a scene where an employee comes to ask for help. This would give the manager a chance to learn not to try to resolve the problem for the employee, but ask questions that could help the latter find a solution on his or her own, etc. Rather than simply explaining the general principles of the behavior to adopt, this type of exercise facilitates the acquisition of concrete reflexes.

- **Graduate challenges.**

Coaches should not hesitate to start with simple – and even simplistic – exercises, with a focus on details. These initial steps are extremely important to put coaching recipients at ease and prepare them for more complex exercises. Recently appointed to an executive position, for example, an IT company manager started with... vocal placement exercises. Her boss had indeed noted

that she tended to end sentences with a rising tone that lacked firmness. Once this apparently minor aspect was resolved, the coaching process could focus on more complex issues, such as the ability to facilitate teams, make decisions, etc.

Offer many opportunities to practice

The more frequently coaching sessions are alternated with practical exercises, the more rapidly the behavior will become habitual for the individual. Advantage should be taken of every possible opportunity to rehearse the new behavior, even if this means adapting the learning process to the person's schedule. Coaching on public speaking, for example, is most effective if it is organized at a time when the concerned individual has many chances to speak at meetings or make speeches within his or her unit.

Adapt the program based on feedback obtained

Those on the receiving end of coaching are not always in the best position to judge the impact of newly acquired

FIGURE E Mental models

- Mental models are **intellectual patterns** that define our vision of the world and our behavior.
E.g.: "Car = small motor vehicle with four wheels" is a mental model. "In life, you have to manage on your own" is another mental model.
- Mental models **result from our past experiences and influence the way we view the present**.
E.g.: A person who has been betrayed in the past will have trouble trusting others.
- They may **not be suited to new situations** that we encounter.
E.g.: A systematic search for consensus can be counterproductive in a crisis context.
- Because they influence our behavior, they tend to be **self-confirming**.
E.g.: An executive persuaded that one of his subordinates does not have the experience required to do the job will tend to provide less support, thus contributing to that person's failure.

People need to take a **step back** in order to take an objective look at their mental models:

- Identify the original experiences underlying the model to put them into perspective.
- Regularly test new assumptions.
E.g.: "What if meeting the deadline were more important than handing in a perfect report?"
- Compare your mental models with those of other people.
E.g.: A sales manager and a quality manager probably don't have the same beliefs about what is most important to customers.
- Imagine extreme situations where your mental models would no longer be valid.
E.g.: What would happen if everyone were as quiet as you at meetings? How would that affect the performance of the team?

behavior, what adjustments are required or what improvements are still needed. The coach must therefore be attentive to the reactions of the person's colleagues and adapt the coaching plan in consequence. For example, after being coached, the CIO of a financial services firm was universally recognized to have made remarkable progress in interpersonal communication and the capacity to collaborate with other department heads. On the other hand, this change had some negative side effects, as the IT department, henceforth much more closely integrated in the company, had trouble coordinating activities among various internal customers and made promises that it couldn't keep on several occasions. Coaching work was then adapted to focus on these areas.

5 Maintain motivation

In the course of the change process, people naturally go through periods of doubt and resistance, which can emerge subconsciously. The coach must consequently remain vigilant and continuously motivate them to complete the entire process.

Help people recognize their successes

People are frequently discouraged by the feeling that things aren't progressing. To combat this impression, the coach must help the concerned individual to acknowledge what he or she has accomplished and encourage him or her to celebrate successes as they should. For instance, at the start of a coaching program, one manager wrote down some phrases uttered by a subordinate he was mentoring, expressing doubts concerning his ability to become a better salesperson. When the first positive results began to emerge, the manager brought out this document showing these doubts in the person's own words. Faced with the evidence, the individual in question had to admit that he had come further than

he had originally thought possible, and became more confident in his ability to continue progressing.

Listen to feelings

New behavior initially generates strong feelings of insecurity – people lose their bearings and no longer recognize themselves. They wonder whether they are doing the right thing, etc. Falling back to old, more comfortable ways is thus highly tempting. To combat this risk, the coach must hear

People must stay motivated over time in order to overcome the inevitable setbacks.

and acknowledge the legitimacy of the person's concerns, underlining that they are a normal part of change. One extremely introverted entertainment company executive had managed to participate actively in two meetings he attended. However, he found this attitude contrasted so sharply with his usual self-image that he doubted that he could keep it up. The fact that he confided these feelings to his boss, who confirmed that his contribution had been much appreciated by the other participants, turned out to be very helpful in getting over the hump.

Identify the causes of resistance

An individual who has started a change process is often tempted to throw in the towel on the toughest challenges. The role of the coach is then to help the person to overcome this resistance and see the process through to its conclusion. In the previous example, the coach asked the employee why speaking at the meeting ran counter to his self-image. It came out that this individual continued to see himself as a newcomer with no legitimacy in the organization, rather than as a team leader with responsibilities. When this identity conflict was brought to light,

the employee was able to make a conscious choice about what he wanted to become – a real manager. From that point on, he had much less trouble acting the part at meetings.



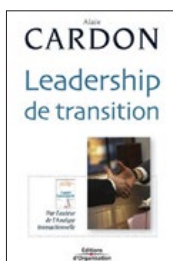
Changing a behavior that is deeply linked to personality is never easy – especially since people may not even be aware that their behavior is a problem. The help of a "coaching manager" is instrumental in success. Indeed, a manager can motivate a subordinate to make necessary changes, help identify and challenge the mental models that support the undesired behavior, guide the learning process, and help the person practice new attitudes and get through times of doubt.

Our selection

To find the best ideas on this subject, we recommend the following publications:

Coaching Leaders

Daniel White, Jossey-Bass, 2006.



Taking on management or leadership functions often requires unlearning certain behaviors and integrating new ones. Because this is a difficult and painful process, more and more managers turn to coaching. In this book illustrated with innumerable examples drawn from practical experience, Daniel White shares the observations made over the course of the many years that he has helped managers transform themselves.

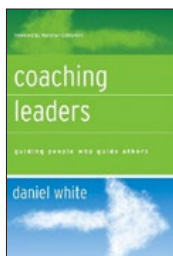
One of the key passages of the book is the description of the behavioral change process in chapters 4 and 5. This topic is covered in greater depth in chapters 7 and 12, where you will find many tips on how to stimulate and maintain the motivation to change, identify the best pace for progression, etc.

A large part of the book is dedicated to the work of the coach, the nature of the assignment (chapter 3), the approaches that he or she can employ – cognitive, behavioral, etc. – (chapters 10 and 13), the techniques that he or she can utilize (chapters 8 and 9), the problems that he or she frequently encounters (chapter 11) and the self-knowledge that he or she must possess to help others effectively (chapter 6). Finally, chapter 14 offers a list of classic coaching situations.

Lengthy chapter 2 offers a description of existing theories on leadership. Although interesting, this chapter will teach nothing new to those familiar with the subject and is not obligatory reading to understand the rest of the book.

Leadership de transition

[Transition Leadership], Alain Cardon, Les Editions d'Organisation, 2005.



Continuous change is the standard today in business. Everything is transitory—organizational practices, work methods, products, IT systems, etc. Employees experience these changes as destabilizing and must make a continuous effort to adapt. For Alain Cardon, professional coach and recognized authority in this domain, one of the fundamental roles of the manager is to help people make the necessary adjustments.

The precept of the book is founded on a strong distinction: some changes are voluntary and handled well by those concerned, while others are forced upon them. Hence, the distinction made between two coaching

methods—project management support on the one hand, and mourning support on the other. The book is divided into two parts covering these approaches respectively, which can each be read independently.

Each type of change can be broken down into four phases, covered in detail in a dedicated chapter with the corresponding support methods, i.e. conception, consolidation, maturation and distancing phases for project management support (chapters 1 to 4), reaction, remembrance, retraction and negotiation phases for mourning support (chapters 6 to 9). Chapters 5 and 10 summarize the evolution of specific parameters in the course of each process, e.g. how concerned employees perceive time, the types of relationships they maintain, what drives them, etc.

Further readings

To explore this topic further:

- **Coaching d'entreprise** [Corporate Coaching], Edouard Stacke, Village Mondial, 2000. (Book)
Institutionalize coaching in your organization.
- **Flawed Advice and the Management Trap**, Chris Argyris, Oxford University Press, 2000. (Book)
Make your advice more efficient.
- **Mind-Set Management**, Samuel A. Culbert, Oxford University Press, 1996. (Book)
Learn to advise your employees effectively.
- **Le manager à l'écoute** [The Attentive Manager], Yves Blanc, Dunod, 2002. (Book)
Improve your listening skills.
- **The art of questioning** (Manageris synopsis148b)
Develop your ability to ask questions that motivate people to engage and improve themselves.
- **Emotional intelligence**, Daniel Goleman, Robert Laffont, 1997. (Book)
Develop your understanding of your own emotions and those of others.

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