

Gary Wyles, Managing Director, Festo Training & Consulting

What is coaching?

Coaching is releasing a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them. Every coaching interaction is different and indeed every coach's approach is diverse.



It is easy to become immune to the jargon that we use everyday in our role in training and development. Just because we've been speaking about coaching for decades, we assume that the industries in which we work and the people we are talking to, have a similar amount of knowledge.

In manufacturing and engineering, some of the main sectors we operate in, this is certainly not the case. Perhaps at senior

leadership levels in large corporations it might be different. Here they would have read about coaching, they could have experienced coaching themselves, but in smaller companies and in the middle and first time management positions, there is still confusion over coaching.

Yes, we can use the sporting analogy but what that fires in people's imagination, is a manager and coach jumping up and down on the side-lines and shouting

loudly and berating the players. That's about as far from the truth as you can get. When Festo first decided to instil a coaching culture throughout our engineering organisation, it wasn't enough just to tell people what we were doing. We had to first of all convince them why the organisation needed to change and why their behaviour needed to adapt. In our situation, we had to find a way to differentiate ourselves from the myriad of other manufacturers who could offer



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Understanding the coaching process

Because every coach is different, there will be a myriad of different coaching models and processes that can be followed. Indeed, a Google search found 48 million references to coaching models.

Models are important because coaching does not happen as a ‘one off’ engagement. It cannot happen on the hoof. It absolutely needs to be a fully engaged commitment – both by the coach and the coachee – and then rigorously instigated and continuously improved. Individuals can either adopt or create their own coaching model. They need to find a process and a method of engagement that works for them.

Getting to know your team members

We all believe we know our team well. We know how they perform at work. We might have a personal relationship with them. We believe that we understand their personality.

However, we can easily make false assumptions. We can forget that just like ourselves, people might present themselves differently at work to how they’re actually feeling inside. That over-confident 22 year old graduate could easily be masking a highly insecure individual. When a stalwart team member’s performance suddenly takes a dive perhaps you don’t really know what is the cause.

Coaching requires a deep understanding of the personalities of your team. While personality assessments, such as DiSC®, can play a part, it’s only through a high level of trust and empathy, effective and active listening and understanding both verbal and non-verbal communication, that a real understanding of your team emerges.

Explore coaching skills

Effective questioning is the basis of most coaching conversations. Using a mixture of open and closed probes, the power of silence and reflection, to dig deeper into the thoughts of the coachee.

Common coaching errors

An important skill is how to summarise discussions without the coach spinning information to fit their own agenda. Equally, coaches need help to recognise and avoid entering into a coaching conversation with preconceptions. These ‘thinking errors’ can cause the coach to lose objectivity and can include:

- Labelling
- Discounting the positive
- Magnification
- Mind-reading
- Fortune-telling
- Blame

Coaching the coach

Just like any skill, coaching takes practice. But it’s not really fair that these practice sessions are played out on coachees themselves. By collectively working with coaches not only are there opportunities for them to practice the skills through role and real plays, but they can also get feedback directly from other coaches.

When we created our coaching culture in Festo, this was the break through point. We created communities of coaches nationally and internationally. They all had the same experience; they were all coaching their team. They established virtual and real groups where they could continue to practice, hone and refine their coaching skills. So while coaching is indeed a skill that can be learnt. It’s never one that’s totally nailed. There’s always more to learn and more that can be done. That is what makes it such an exciting area to be involved with. ■

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