



Maximizing the Impact of Short-term Coaching

Sometimes organizations have a point-need for coaching rather than embarking on a comprehensive long-term coaching strategy. With such an intense focus on short-term demonstrable impact it takes an experienced and confident coach to step up, step in, get the results and step out. These six tips, gleaned from five years' experience coaching managers and leaders across a range of industries, will help to ensure that the coaching impact is achieved in the short-term and sustained long-term.



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1. Clearly define the engagement's context and outcome.

Having absolute clarity on the context and outcome of the coaching intervention is critical to success in any coaching engagement, but especially so for short-term coaching. Notice I said outcome, not outcomes: When addressing a particular goal or concern, doing one thing well at once focuses everyone's efforts in the same direction.

2. Ask yourself whether you can deliver value.

There can be a temptation for coaches to take on every engagement that presents itself; it is important that you also take care of yourself in order to better serve others. The high accountability for delivering results through others coupled with the objectivity of the outcome adds a background tension to delivery; some coaches flourish under the pressure and actively seek it but others find it distracts them from delivering their best.

To deliver results quickly requires a high degree of openness from the coachee; it is time well spent to consider whether you will be able to develop a strong rapport and trust with the coachee from the very first meeting. Of course you

need to be credible, capable and confident. It will also be helpful if you are relevant; i.e., if you have an understanding of the client's context and industry, ways of working, gender, and culture.

3. Engage the appropriate parties.

To deliver short-term demonstrable impact, the coachee, his or her supervisor, the human-resources representative, and the coach must be open and transparent in discussing the context and outcome; there is no place for a hidden agenda. Of course you'll handle it sensitively, but in addition to discussing the beneficial outcomes, also ask, "What is the consequence for the coachee if the outcome is not achieved?" Will he or she be passed over for a promotion? Fired? Understanding the consequence is part of fully understanding the context.

The cornerstone of a successful short-term coaching engagement is a coachee who is ready, willing and able to engage fully with the coaching process. Pay attention, trust your instincts and discuss any aspect of the engagement that seems questionable until all parties are satisfied.

The written coaching agreement will include the usual confidentiality,

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commercial and logistic sections; it should also include the measurable outcome along with the baseline and target measures (e.g. increase percentage of actual sales vs. target sales from current value of 96 percent (today's date) to target of 100 percent (by a specific date). If there is a management report in which this information is available it can be included in an appendix to the coaching agreement as the baseline. More qualitative measures include 360-degree feedback reports, etc. If the coaching fees are offered as a gain-share agreement, also state the percentage of the fee at risk for non-delivery and the incentive arrangements for exceeding expectations.

4. Ensure the right fit.

Maximizing the impact from short-term coaching generally requires a challenging—and accelerated—approach, with the coach asking searching questions and often touching on core beliefs and values very early in the coaching process.

Quickly establishing trust and rapport is aided by having an informal, 30-minute “getting-to-know-you” discussion immediately before the first coaching session. You might even consider including some questions about your coachee's interests and hobbies in your pre-coaching questionnaire.

Although following the first three steps increases the likelihood of a good fit, my

coaching agreement calls for a formal decision point after the first coaching session so that both the coachee and I have the option to curtail or reshape the coaching agreement if we have concerns.

5. Find the right balance of “support” and “challenge.”

Traditional coaching has a tendency toward support, but in an organizational context you need more than just a strong relationship—you also need challenge to create sustained change in the individual and the organization.

Low support paired with high challenge is unhelpful and generates stress, but high support and high challenge equals what I refer to as “tough empathy.” Support is given through trust, rapport and building the relationship. Challenge is given through feedback, accountability, setting courageous goals, balancing the tension to move the coachee out of their comfort zone and looking at situations from a systems mindset that considers the needs of all stakeholders.

The coach, in taking on a short-term coaching agreement with objective outcomes, is also modeling the behaviors that many organizations seek when they select a coach for a point-need coaching intervention.

The powerful combination of demonstrating genuine care for the coachee, seeing the world through his eyes, unlocking

full potential through powerful deep questioning and mutual accountability for measurable results in a defined time frame acts as a catalyst for the coaching and makes it possible to deliver results quickly. To get fast results the coach has to address the root causes, not the symptoms; the underlying beliefs, not the observable actions.

6. Quantify impact and set the stage for sustainable change.

Demonstrating the achievement of the target key performance indicators is simply a matter of comparing the baseline, actual and target measures. The coachee will also likely want to include some additional qualitative benefits in the coaching outcomes report.

Encourage the coachee to include in the coaching outcomes report three ways in which his mind-set has changed as a result of the coaching and three new habits that will sustain the coaching outcomes; it helps the coachee to consolidate the coaching and provides a point of reference when you follow up in six months' time to confirm that the coaching has led to sustained behavior change.

By having the courage and confidence to ask searching questions from the outset and provide consistent challenge it is possible to get fast results that last. 