

Manager and coach

Managers are well-placed to coach staff to lift their performance, says Stewart Forsyth. He outlines how effective coaching can build personal awareness and motivate skill development.



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Imagine a different sort of golf game with the following rules. You tee off in the dark—you can't see the ball to hit, nor can you see where it goes. When you get the ball on the green and begin putting, the cup moves around. And when the game is over, you toss to see who won!

Sound like a strange game? Well that's the way many businesses attempt to motivate staff and manage performance.

Many employees do not see the connection between their efforts and the direction of the business. Often they don't even know what are the more important parts of their job. In other words, they're swinging away at the ball, not knowing where it is, or where they are trying to go.

Not only do many employees not know where they're heading, they often get little feedback from their manager—and when they do, it's usually when something has gone wrong. Not knowing how they are doing is like hitting a golf ball that hardly ever finds the cup.

As more and more studies show, a key motivator for people is developing capability and therefore getting ahead in their career. But opportunity for development often seems like a lottery—just like deciding that it's too hard to total the scores after completing the round and tossing a coin to find the winner.

Over the last few years there has been a revolution in business measurement. This means that we can now show that people issues make a big difference to

the success of an organisation.

As mentioned above, one of the key drivers of motivation and performance is the opportunity for personal development. We know such opportunities come about from working with other talented people, being involved in and learning from participative decision-making, and from formal and informal coaching with team leaders and managers.

Seize the moment

Such coaching moments are often the most important development opportunity your people get. And there are benefits for managers too—their people achieve more as they learn from the skills and institutional knowledge of the person coaching them.

By engaging their people in such learning opportunities, leaders can ensure staff are getting the 'just in time' development that will make a difference on the current task or project. Such opportunities can lift both the performance and engagement of employees.

But what are your leaders' coaching skills like? For coaching to make a difference, managers must also be able to share their learning.

We know that the technical competence that may have led to a leadership role is not the only relevant competence. Managers will often need help to develop such coaching skills as questioning, listening, giving behavioural feedback and summarising.

Although many have already

developed such skills intuitively, training can help them identify and use the skills more thoughtfully.

Managers may also benefit from developing models—both verbal and pictorial—of what they have learned about how the world works. Often they have learned how to manage complex systems without reading the instruction manual—because it usually doesn't exist—but they can learn to distill that wisdom down to some pithy aphorisms or simple diagrams that will get their message across.

Optimise opportunities

What are the techniques that managers can use to promote the development of others? A useful model is provided by Max Landsberg (*The Tao of Coaching*). In both formal reviews and informal sessions, he suggests, the coach can use the GROW model to build personal awareness and motivate skill development in the 'coachee'. He outlines four steps that the manager working to lift the performance of his or her staff can follow:

- **Goal:** Set the scene by ensuring you are both focused on the same goal. Get the attention of the person being coached, but don't spook them—they need to be able to take it all in which is hard if they have switched into panic mode.
- **Reality:** Review the information. Stick to the facts—you may need to do some feedback, but try to get the coachee's self-assessment.

- **Options:** Work on ways to improve, covering a wide range of options. Best to ask employees for their ideas first, then you can build on these.

- **Wrap-up:** Agree what each of you are going to do, and how you'll know you have succeeded. Don't wrap up until you have committed to action.

Let's look at the example of Jane. She has a trainee salesperson and she grabs the chance to discuss some client feedback with her.

Jane: 'Ruth, how are you, I've just got the satisfaction results from XYZ. Can we talk about that? The results are good for friendliness and value, but below standard for responsiveness. This is an important dimension because typically responsiveness is the best predictor of our customer's loyalty. So you can see that I am concerned about this.' (*Goal.*)

Ruth: 'Right. What scores did they give us?'

Jane: 'Here's a copy for you. You can see that the comments are OK. It's just that score below 7 that worries me. What do you think?'

 (*Reality.*)

Ruth: 'Yes, I agree. I'm surprised, because they've never said anything to me about responsiveness. But, sure, this is a worry.'

Jane: 'What do you think we

should do?" (*Options.*)

Ruth: "Well why not ask them why they gave us the score? No? How about I go and visit them, and say we want to do better. Obviously we can if they give us a 5. So, I ask them what can we do better?"

Jane: "How do you think they'd react?"

Ruth: "I think there's some rapport there, especially with Brian. I don't think they'd see it as defensiveness on our part if that's what you mean. No, I think they'd appreciate the opportunity to give us some feedback."

Jane: "OK you chase that up Ruth. Anything I can do to help?" (*Wrap-up.*)

An important part of this coaching process is to check where the other person is in terms of their stress level. I use a 'moderation' stress model—a moderate amount is a good thing. This is based on the 'in-

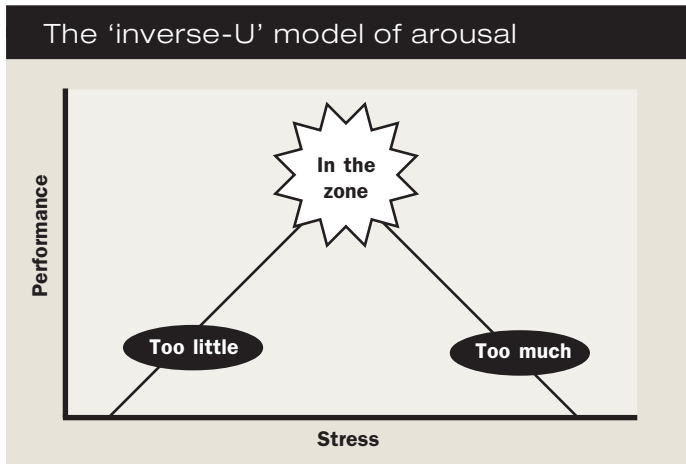
verse-U' model of arousal which is illustrated at right.

If your staff are either under-loaded or over-loaded they will not be capable of their best performance. Being in the optimum zone is what motivates people.

If people tell you they want more challenges, load them on. If they complain about the sort of things that we would often associate with high stress (work overload, unclear role expectations, lack of team support), you need to work together on generating options to help.

The relationship between stress and performance is a tricky one. One of the 'symptoms' of stress is a drop-off in performance so any performance coaching situation must cover the stress issue.


And what about when the process of coaching itself becomes stressful? I have come across instances where the situ-



ation and the process have moved the person (in their view) too far along the stress curve.

What to do if your expectation of optimal stress and performance level differs from that of the person being coached? The best approach is to work on a total rehabilitation plan. Agree a set of goals starting at relatively low levels. Help the person to achieve by building

on success to reach appropriate levels of performance.

Managers are the people who have the greatest potential coaching leverage. They can raise capability and simultaneously lift performance. Their coaching effectiveness is a critical part of their effectiveness as a leader. The good news is that these skills are very learnable and immediately rewarding. 

Crucial calendar 2004

Contact	Subject	Date	Venue
AUT Ph: 0800FOR AUT	Management skills for the new manager	3 & 4 May	Auckland
	Interpersonal skills for business	5 May	Auckland
	Conflict resolution: avoiding costly legal processes	6 & 7 May	Auckland
	Introduction to supervision & team leadership	10 May	Auckland
	Teamwork skills for supervisors & team members	17 & 18 May	Auckland
Bright Star Ph: 09 379 5892	7th Annual Remuneration Conference	26 & 27 May	Wellington
	Essential training skills for managers and those who instruct others in the workplace	17 & 18 June	Auckland
		23 & 24 June	Wellington
Conferenz Ph: 09 912 3615	Increasing your effectiveness under pressure	11 & 12 May	Auckland
		26 & 27 May	Wellington
NZIM (Canterbury) Ph: 03 379 2302 www.managementsouth.co.nz	ABCs of win-win relationships	19-21 May	Christchurch
	Executive staff course	22-29 May	Christchurch
	Appreciative inquiry	9 June	Christchurch
	Advanced management programme	13-25 June	Christchurch
STA www.sta.co.nz	Managing change	31 May-2 June	Auckland
	Foundations for effective supervision	9-11 June	Auckland
	Monitoring & managing team performance	23-25 June	Auckland
University of Auckland Short Courses Ph: 09 373 7599 ext. 7862	Conflict management	5 & 6 May	Auckland
	Optimising the performance appraisal meeting	7 May	Auckland
	How to understand and use power constructively in your organisation	10 & 11 May	Auckland
	How to lead a winning team	13 & 14 May	Auckland