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learningmaterials
High Performing Teams

Learning Materials

These materials supplement and expand upon the skills and
principles delivered in the training.

Delegation

As part of your job you will need (if not necessarily want) to delegate work to others in your team. Many people experience real challenges with delegation. They worry about the amount of time that it will take, and whether or not the person to whom they are delegating will have the potential, experience or skill to produce a finished product that is in line with what they themselves would create. Underlying this is a common trait– conscientiousness, or put simply, the drive to not only finish a job but to do it to an extremely high standard.

The potential problem with conscientiousness, if it is not appropriately managed (for example, when under stress or exceptionally busy times) is that its close cousin, perfectionism, will rear its and take over. The effect of this is of being unable and / or unwilling to leave a task that is quite clearly good (enough). Now, it is natural to want to limit anything which will put the quality of the completed task at risk, and for many people, that means others' involvement. They report that they would rather do it themselves than leave it to others, even to the detriment of their own workload, time management and opportunity to get involved in other tasks and projects more appropriate to their growing experience and skill.

Unfortunately, as you become more senior, you have to learn how to delegate, and to leave well alone, until your involvement is needed again. Even if you have the time, the inclination and the skills to develop others, different people need different approaches – this is not a one-size-fits-all approach. You need to understand whether they too have the inclination and the skills also to get on and do it.

The Skill / Will matrix (from "The Tao of Coaching" by Max Landsberg) is a handy starting point on how to tailor your approach to delegation, management and feedback when you are entrusting people with a task. Its starting points are:

- Consider, in relation to the task, whether the person's level of **skill** is high or low (this will depend on their experience, training, understanding)

- Consider, in relation to the task, whether their level of **motivation** is high or low (this will depend on their desire to achieve, incentives, security, confidence)

Once you have thought about this, you can then approach the delegation and management of the task in one of four ways:

High Will but Low Skill? Guide. Give them lots of on- and off-the-job training; mentor them; check in frequently on progress and outcomes.

Low Will and Low Skill? Direct. Tell them exactly what you expect of them, when and how. Explain that their attitude needs to shift, quickly.

High Skills but Low Will? Excite. Explore the underlying problem and create a vision of what could be. Get them to articulate what would need to happen to get them there.

High Skill and High Will? Delegate and Coach. Give them the outcome that you want and then let them get on with it in a way that works for them, but produces that outcome.

Whatever the level of skill / will, you may also find it useful to approach the delegation discussion using the following five stages:

Define – give them the broader context that the job they will be doing sits within

Aim – explain exactly what you need them to achieve

Plan – agree – based on your assessment of their skill / will – exactly how they will approach the task. Include in this discussion exactly how often you want them to check in with you (and vice versa), and why. For example "I need to keep a close eye on progress, because I know you don't have a lot of experience in this area"

Do – now it's over to them, but before you send them off to get started, put the ball in their court:

- **Ask** – What questions do you have for me?

- **Say** – Now I'd like you to summarise for me exactly what you're doing and why (this means that they don't go off having said they're ok but are in fact confused / worried / clueless

Review – during (as agreed) but also once the task has been completed. Discuss – "What went well?"; "What didn't go so well?"; "What could you / we do differently next time?"

Of course, if people are in a place other than High Skill and High Will, you'd expect that there would be a change over time (e.g. away from High Will but Low Skill and into High Skill and High Will) and a commensurate change in your style. Otherwise you run the risk of being either too hands off and the person fails, or too hands on and they become demotivated.

	Skill	
High **Will** **Low**	**High Will, Low Skill?** **Guide** Provide a safe environment in which to make mistakes; get them to report back to you and give regular feedback to them as well as on and off the job training. .	**High Skill, High Will?** **Delegate and Coach** Give free rein to go about projects/tasks – but remember that these people want / need / value feedback and support. Your outcome will be the same; the process by which you go about it may be different.
	Low Will, Low Skill? **Direct** Is this a short-term issue? If so, fine. You'll need to keep an eye on it – lots of specific instructions, and an expectation that things shift, quickly.	**High Skill, Low Will?** **Excite** What's gone wrong here? Has there been a personality clash? Lack of development opportunity? Ask them what they'd like and how they can make that happen. Create a vision of the future with / alongside them.
Low	**Skill**	**High**

References: The Tao of Coaching, Max Landsberg, Profile Books Ltd

Exercise:

Consider a person in your team. Take up to six of the tasks that s/he has to perform regularly. Plot their performance against each one relative to their levels of skill and will. Where do they need most and least support?

Who?			
Task?	Level of Skill / Will?	Approach?	Feedback pointers?

If you've considered the person's level of skill and will, not only does it inform the most appropriate way to delegate, but also it helps you:

- consider how much of a stretch is appropriate for the person

- develop empathy (there was probably a time when you were in one of those boxes in relation to a similar task)

- to avoid unconscious bias (I.e. the halo / horns effect) and making judgements in terms of their intention versus the effect of their action

Feedback, Exploration and Coaching

Sometimes you'll do one, two or all three of the above. You can start at any point, go back and forwards between them, but ultimately they should lead to one thing – action. During the training we tended to tackle each stage individually in order to practise them, however real life brings about a different set of circumstances! Taking each in turn:

Feedback

Feedback falls into three categories: **good, constructive and bad:**

Good feedback: gives guidance about the things that people should do more of because they are having a positive effect.

Constructive feedback: highlights what isn't working, and outlines and explores ways in which the person's approach to tasks, their behaviours (and even attitudes) can be changed for the better.

Bad feedback**:** is vague, judgemental and based as much on a person's own gut feel as it is demonstrable evidence.

Please refer to the hand-outs on **Giving and Receiving Feedback** for additional information, but let's look at the AID(E) Model in practice, delivering a message that's all about good feedback:

AID(E)

When you're delivering feedback, do consider when and where you do it, and do introduce it properly. Something as simple as "I'm going to give you some feedback" sets the scene:

Action	When you….	Led the meeting this morning
	I saw….	you presented in a very structured way…
	I heard…..	that the audience responded very positively by asking lots of questions and gave you a huge round of applause
Impact	For me….	Was that I could imagine letting you lead all of the events from now on…
	For your colleagues / the team / the firm…..	And that they have some really great tips and hints to apply…
	For you….	And that's all great for your personal profile and brand
Desired Outcome	So next time….	do more of the same!
Exploration (if appropriate)	What do you think went well; and what would you do differently next time?	

Intention versus Effect

There is a school of thought that says every action starts from a place of *positive* intention – even if that isn't the effect! When we are dealing with others' actions / behaviours, we need to take a moment to step into their shoes (that empathy thing again) and try to understand – as challenging as it might be to do so – what the person is trying to do.

Now – sometimes people are aware of the effect of their actions on others. In which case, you need to spell out what the effect will be for them personally, now and in the future. This is another reason why you should do this little exercise before giving them feedback – to identify the hook that will motivate them to change.

Principles of Coaching:

This training session is not about turning you into an Executive Coach. It is however about giving you the tools and techniques to take a different approach with people that will encourage them to:

- do more thinking for themselves

- come to you with options prepared

- accept that you're not there to take the problem away and make their lives as easy as possible

In essence, coaching is about change. But it's about putting the other person in the driving seat, encouraging them to articulate as far as they are able to what they need, what they have tried in pursuit of that need, and what else they could do.

Your job is to listen, ask questions, reflect, summarise and keep the conversation on track. All skills that you no doubt use lots of with clients, but perhaps less so with colleagues.

Please refer to the **$64,000 Questions** hand-out for more information.

Advice and Information

You're a manager, so you have responsibility and accountability in terms of people's performance. All too often it's tempting to jump straight in with the solution when they're stuck (you're busy, they're busy, internal and / or external clients' demands are piling up) but it's important to give people time and space to reflect on a) what's happening and what they've already tried and b) what options are open to them.

Should they arrive at an option themselves that you both agree is workable, but don't quite understand e.g. the process involved, it's perfectly ok to offer information to help them on their way.

Is it ever ok to give advice? In the situation where you're manager *and* coaching, yes it is. Remember this however: advice breeds dependency (if it goes well) or blame (if it goes badly). If there are several things that people could do, list them in terms of **possible options –** and then see if the other person can articulate why these options are plausible. If there is only one choice – because to do anything else would be illegal / too risky / too expensive – you need to spell this out.

So in summary – as a manager using a coaching approach, sometimes you'll need to do it, but consider what else you could do beforehand, and then use it as a last resource.

Brainstorming

Linked to the point above, a good way to explore ideas (and throw your own pet solution into the mix) is with a brainstorm. It's good at the "options" stage to create some energy, broaden their horizons, and leave them in control. Run it like this:

- You can use a flipchart or a notebook – it doesn't matter

- Explain that the first stage is to generate as many options as possible in relation to a topic ("get better at business development"; "feel more confident in meetings"; "handle difficult clients", in a couple of minutes, without evaluation of the ideas – that comes next

- Both of you have a pen; you both write up your ideas until all ideas have been recorded

- Put down your pen. Tell the other person that now they have to circle those options they think are viable

- Get them to identify what is viable about them

- Now get them to select which of the options they can put into action, and when

- Job done – simple!

Feedback in the here and now

Delivered using the same process as giving feedback on past performance (see worksheet), this technique can again help people understand the difference between their intentions versus the effect. They are giving you their viewpoint; you are simply delivering a perspective that they may not have heard previously.

Give prior warning of it. Deliver it. Ask for their thoughts.

Mini meta-mirror

A good way to lift the energy and a way of taking people out of their current mindset (usually stuck, frustrated and sometimes unhappy) back to a time when they were feeling confident and able (this is what the question about "you at your most resourceful" is geared towards too). Do this:

- Explain that you're going to do a quick exercise designed to shift perspective

- Both stand up

- Face the chair that the other person has just vacated

- Explain that they're to imagine they are still sitting in the chair.

- From where they're standing, think about a time when they felt at their most confident, able and resourceful. What advice would that past self give to their present self in the chair?

- Take your time with this – give them space to think and then speak

- Have confidence in doing so – it works

Troubleshooting

- **People cry.** Emotion is perfectly normal. Tears are a manifestation of something – shock, anger, embarrassment. You don't need to take that feeling away (indeed you can't). Allow the person as much time as they need. Offer to get them water, or a tissue (you may even have some to hand). Let them cry. Remember – the message was delivered for a reason. If they really are too upset and you decide to park the discussion, come back to it within 24 hours.

- **People lose their temper.** Again, anger is a natural emotion – but people need to express it appropriately. It's one thing for them to say, calmly and with an appropriate tone / volume "I feel angry". It's another thing altogether to bring shouting and screaming into the room. Stop the discussion. Tell them this behaviour is inappropriate and explain what they should be doing. If need be, again postpone the discussion until they are calmer – but try first of all to get them to calm down in the meeting.

- **People are indifferent to the feedback you're delivering.** Are they? Use your "feedback in the here and now" technique to check out what's really going on. If your assumptions are correct, then explain what's at stake here e.g. reputation; opportunity to get involved in more interesting work; or relationships with those round them. Keep a note of these conversations – in the face of a continued lack of change, you will need to refer to your notes if you're involving Human Resources.

- **People seem to agree with you – and yet nothing changes.** Have they truly understood what you're telling them? How do you know? By getting them to summarise a) what they've heard, and b) what they will do – and why. Should you find yourself having this conversation on more than one occasion, ask them – "What do you think the risks are for you if nothing changes in the next three / six / nine months?" "What are the benefits to you / us / the firm of you staying the same?".

- **People are in denial – or disagreement.** You can't make them believe what you're telling them. But what you can tell them is that other people's views can't be disregarded totally; each person's perspective is their own truth. They have a choice – live with those perceptions, but if they don't like them, only they can do something to change them.