

Coaching: A Vanishing Art

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Much has been written about the impact of aging baby boomers leaving the workplace. Baby boomers are the generation born between 1946 and 1964, and the impact of their coming retirement in the United States and Canada is significant. On January 1, 2006, the first of 77 million of them in the U.S. turned 60; in 2011 they will turn 65. In 2006, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that baby boomers would turn 60 at the rate of over 7,900 every day and 330 every hour. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the labor force of workers age 55 and older is anticipated to grow by 11.3 million during the 2004–14 period, *nearly four times* the growth rate of the overall labor force.¹

According to 2006 Canadian census data, Canadians approaching retirement are now the fastest-growing demographic in that country. The number of Canadians aged 55 to 64 – those most likely to be thinking about retirement – jumped by 28 per cent in the past five years to 3.7 million. The sharp increase can be attributed to Canada's aging baby boomers, who account for close to one-third of the country's 32 million people.² Statistics Canada says the numbers of retirement-aged Canadians in the workforce will continue to increase – in less than 10 years, one in five people in the workforce will be aged 55 to 64.³

Until now, the executive population has grown roughly in line with GDP. This means that an economic growth rate of 2 percent for 15 years would increase demand for executives by about a third. But *supply* is moving in the opposite direction. Moreover, no significant countervailing trends are apparent. Women are no longer surging into the workforce, white-collar productivity improvements have flattened, immigration levels are stable, and until very recently, executives were not prolonging their careers.⁴

From the knowledge gap that will result as these elder statesmen and stateswomen, civil servants and policymakers leave the formal workplace, to the "hit" that this demographic wave of departures will have on organizations' retirement funds and pension plans, the impact will be enormous.

Never before has there been such a critical need within organizations for coaching and mentoring skills. With massive departures from the workforce at senior levels, the next generation of leaders will have a big responsibility for continuing their organizations'

¹ Mitra Toossi, "Labor Force Projections to 2014: Retiring Boomers," *Monthly Labor Review*, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, November 2005, pp.25–44.

² CBC News: Baby boomers swell ranks of retirement-aged Canadians Last Updated: Tuesday, July 17, 2007 | 9:48 PM ET

³ Statistics Canada, "Population Projections" from The Daily Quotidian, 12/15/2005

⁴ McKinsey Quarterly 1998 Number 3: *The War for Talent*, page 47

performance and prosperity, as well as preserving and growing wealth for retiring boomers, for themselves and for the generations to come.

The Decline of the Art of Coaching

This is not a new challenge for the successor population. As people progress in their careers and move up the organizational ladder, there is a gradual realization that progressively greater responsibility must be assumed for the welfare of the enterprise and its constituents – past, present and future. There is, however, one problem that has been a silent threat, and it has become increasingly visible over the past few years.

In the 1980s and 90s, organizations started to remove layers of management, roles that generated what was thought of as excessive overhead. Senior people were expected to flatten their organizations, roll up their sleeves, "do more with less," and produce, produce, produce. What quietly disappeared at the same time was a critical skill set that has not been obvious until recently – the art of coaching.

Coaching's demise is often lamented but not readily understood. People complain about its absence, and it takes the form of comments like: "I don't have anyone who's watching my back." "We don't have performance reviews, let alone development conversations." "It's all about the numbers. There's no coaching." "Nobody has time to talk to anyone about how they are doing their jobs – just about what they produce."

In the days before this press to reduce headcount, providing coaching was an implicit part of a good manager's role. Managers were always scrutinizing the work of their younger colleagues, providing them with feedback, soliciting input on their performance and potential, and generally guiding them through their career. The career path was not necessarily prescribed but it certainly carried an expectation of progression and growth over a period of time.

With the "right-sizing," cost cutting and efficiency initiatives of the past three decades, managers have learned how to produce results in a lean and focused manner. There is no doubt that this was necessary. Both the corporate and public sectors had gotten a little "fat." However, there were some unconsidered consequences that are now coming to light and it is becoming clearer what it is costing to have a dearth of coaching in organizational life. With the exit of the baby boomers in the next five to ten years, organizations will be leaving their futures in the hands of people who are not feeling fully prepared for the responsibility of the job. Or worse, they may view themselves as prepared, but people who work with them would say otherwise.

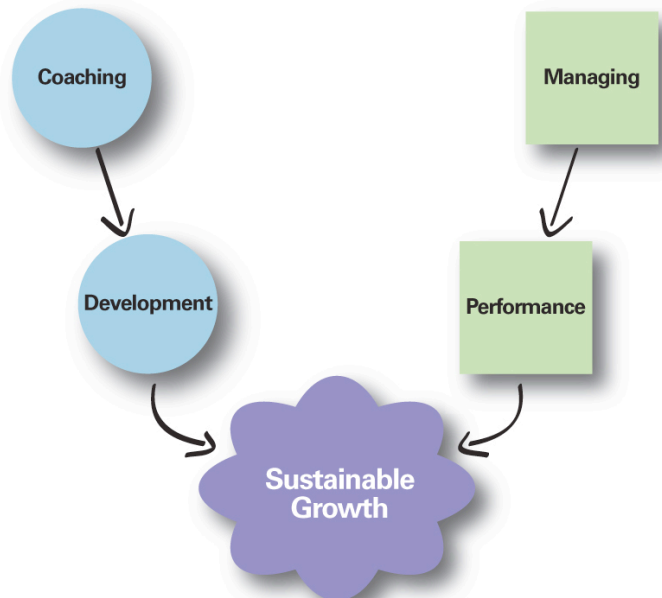
Everyone knows how important feedback and coaching are, yet most companies don't do them very well. Seventy-three percent of executives view informal feedback and coaching as essential or very important to development, but only 30 percent rate their company as excellent or very good at providing them. Sixty percent strongly value being mentored, but only 25 percent are content with their mentoring.⁵

⁵ McKinsey Quarterly 1998 Number 3: *The War for Talent*, page 55

The good news is that there is time for course correction. Humans are amazingly resilient creatures, and they respond well to the kind of attention that has been missing. The attention needed is the lost art of coaching, and it's not difficult for most leaders to provide.

Managing and Coaching: Both Critical for Sustainable Growth

The focus of any organization is performance: the execution of tasks to produce specific results. It is a manager's job to focus on producing the results that his or her organization is counting on – either directly or indirectly through others. However, a focus on performance alone can soon sap people of their energy and sense of meaning. While it can be exciting for awhile (after all, who doesn't love to feel like they're performing?) over a prolonged period, people will start to feel drained, "used up" and burned out unless there is also an accompanying focus on development.



Performance without development leads to peak experiences that cannot be sustained. A sports coach wouldn't dream of asking professional athletes to perform on a sustained basis without also providing them with the means and support necessary for them to train and develop. So why would organizations ask this of people? And yet, they do just that – more than one might care to admit.

The performance demands that most people face in their everyday work lives dwarf those of professional athletes:

- Professional athletes spend about 90% of their time training, in order to perform 10% of the time. Executives are expected to perform at their best for 8, 10 or even 12 hours a day.
- Athletes enjoy an off-season of 4 to 5 months a year. Executives get a few weeks of vacation – some of which is doubtless spent answering e-mail, checking voicemail, and ruminating about work.
- Professional athletes have an average career span of 5 to 7 years. If they manage their money well, they are often set for life. By contrast, people in organizations can probably expect to work for 40 to 50 years without any significant breaks.⁶

⁶ Loehr, Jim and Schwartz, Tony: *The Power of Full Engagement*, Free Press, 2003; page 8

It's no wonder people need sustained attention to their development, to help them keep producing consistent results over extended periods of time!

The inclusion of coaching, alongside of managing, is an investment in the long-term growth of both organizations and the people in them. While the difference between managing and coaching is subtle, the impact is not.

What is Managing?

Management may be defined as *stewardship*, ensuring that the actions and processes within a system are designed to maintain stability and certainty. Goals are identified, tolerances are set within a reasonable range, and output is measured to ensure that stability is maintained for the long-term viability of an enterprise. Therefore, management is about performance. It is about producing results within specific timeframes. This ensures predictability and, usually, incremental growth.

When managers *manage* people, the conversations focus on the task at hand, setting objectives, monitoring the results that are being produced, and auditing or guiding the actions being taken. Managing for good performance is the first step in achieving stability and results. It could be seen as the entry ticket for coaching. It does not make sense to coach someone's longer-term development objectives if his or her current performance objectives are not being met.

Thankfully, most people don't need a lot of management. Human beings have an innate desire to produce, perform and contribute, so when goals are clear and adequate tools/resources are provided most people are productive. Then why worry about "coaching"? What difference does coaching make?

What is Coaching?

When people are *coached*, the focusing is on the development objectives of the individual. A coaching relationship with a person goes beyond getting more out of them – more productivity, results, etc. There is a level of investment being made in time (and sometimes in money) to support the individual's growth, development, and aspirations for the future; not just what the organization needs out of the employee in the next twelve months. It's the organization's way of investing in a renewable resource – its people.

In the absence of this kind of investment for renewal, people literally start to get "used up." The symptoms are obvious: burn out, dysfunctional behavior in the workplace, regrettable talent loss, cynicism, resistance to change, and even poor performance.

Evidence shows that leaders in organizations truly want to coach people, but because it has become a lost art, they aren't exactly sure what to provide. Many of them haven't been coached themselves. (Remember that invisible gap mentioned earlier, when the "boomers" were squeezed out to increase productivity in the 80's and 90's? That's when coaching started to disappear from the workplace.)

Leaders are finding that they're in roles that demand a continued, increasing level of performance and they have to accomplish their tasks through others. While coaching isn't the only people skill to cultivate, it's a critical one. For a manager who has not had the experience of being coached, the question remains: where to begin?

Three Types of Coaching: Expert, Facilitator and Mentor

There are three fundamental types of coaching that are useful when leading people: Expert, Facilitator and Mentor. Each has its advantages, and each has its limitations.

Different Types of Coaching

Context	Process	Content
Expert Coaching	A helper committed to "knowing"	Knowledge and information
Facilitator Coaching	A helper committed to "doing"	Ways and means; how-to's
Mentor Coaching	A committed partnership	Possibilities and opportunities to achieve the employee's commitments and fulfill on potential

Expert Coaching is probably the easiest and most recognizable type of coaching seen in organizations. In Expert Coaching, the coach provides knowledge and information, based on what is needed to achieve the objectives. An example of this kind of coaching could be sharing the details of a new communication initiative. Or perhaps it involves sharing knowledge about an historic module of software that needs to be integrated with a new release. This kind of coaching is relatively straightforward. It is typically transactional – after you have retrieved the expertise you are looking for from the coach, the interaction is complete. The relationship of the two parties is one of "expert and novice."

Facilitator Coaching goes beyond the sharing of knowledge and expertise, although it does include both of those facets. The coach is now "teaching them how to fish," not just "feeding them fish." This involves sharing methodology, training and exploring in terms of approaches to problem-solving. Basically, it means assisting someone in the "how-to's" available for achieving his or her goals. Examples of this would include sharing different approaches to development of a communications plan, providing guidance and training in testing methodologies for software integration to meet quality standards, etc. The coach is not telling a person how to do something, but helping him or her explore different avenues to achieve the goal. The relationship dynamic here is one of being a helper or advisor to someone.

Facilitator Coaching is frequently found in organizations, but less often than Expert coaching. It is usually more time-intensive (it takes more time to teach "how to fish" than to just "fish and feed"), and therefore requires more of an investment on the part of both the coach and the person being coached. And, remember the current demographics of

organizations and the vanishing art of coaching: the aging boomers are very busy just fishing! While it would be ideal to teach more about work process and do less of the "doing" themselves, many of today's leaders relate to this kind of coaching as if it's a luxury of time that they cannot afford. The result of responding to the pressures of increased demands to do "more with less" is what may be referred to as "micromanagement." A certain quiet desperation takes over – "I just need to keep 'fishing' or doing because we've got to hit the numbers, and there's no time for coaching and developing people. They'll just have to figure it out."

This situation gets exacerbated by what may look like shyness, or perhaps pride, that prevents the next generation of workers from asking for Facilitator Coaching. When asked why they aren't demanding more from their managers in this regard, people respond that they don't want to be seen as incompetent or ungrateful. After all, it can be a bit awkward to ask your manager to stop doing their job and, instead, help you see how they've learned to do what they do.

The third kind of coaching, which is least frequently seen in organizations, can be called **Mentor Coaching**. The shift from the previous two types of coaching to this one is significant – in fact it's a shift in the level of interaction from transactional (a short time horizon) to relational (longer-term and based in mutual respect and esteem).

In order to provide Mentor Coaching, there is a partnership established between the manager and subordinate. Mentoring requires a commitment that goes beyond immediate results and payback. A mentor invites someone to share what they are authentically committed to – what their hopes, dreams and aspirations are for their future. It requires the mentor to choose consciously about whether or not they will commit to the potential they see in someone, not just in what they can "produce through them" in the short term.

Mentor coaching is a privileged relationship where the person being coached or mentored shares what might be considered private hopes and dreams, as

A Personal Story about Mentoring

"The first time I was offered mentor coaching, I was scared breathless. My boss's boss called me up to his office one morning after an all-day, departmental meeting. I thought I was in some kind of trouble.

When I arrived at his office in the executive suite, he got up from his desk, offered me a chair at his table and asked if I'd like a cup of coffee. I was very nervous. He then proceeded to tell me that he was impressed with my work, my curiosity and what he saw to be my potential. He offered to provide mentorship to me, because as he said, "Someday I could be working for you." When I asked him what this "mentoring" would look like, he said he wanted to know more about what I wanted out of my career and he would look for different projects and assignments to provide me with opportunities that would support my aspirations. To this day I find it amusing how I responded – I told him I wanted to think about it!!

I'm happy to report that I recovered my wits sufficiently to call him back the next day and accept his offer. This marked the start of my own conscious career development. My relationship with my mentor caused me to really think about what I wanted from my work, my career and ultimately my whole life. I started to put myself in the driver's seat, and could no longer blame "the organization" or anyone else for the way my career was going. I was getting help, and someone was interested in my talents beyond my immediate production capacity. I was being invested in, and I was surprised and grateful! I started to take responsibility for my own career and job satisfaction. In a sense, it made me grow up because I was being treated like a valued contributor and not just another set of hands."

well as vulnerabilities. Offering – and accepting – this kind of relationship might be a bit scary. It requires both the Mentor and the person being mentored to commit to being frank, thoughtful and appreciative of each other's humanity as well as technical and managerial prowess.

The one thing that is always present in a Mentoring relationship is just that: relationship. There is a personal commitment to supporting someone in the development of possibilities and opportunities that will fulfill on the coachee's aspirations and potential. This kind of relationship usually goes beyond a single job assignment, and can often transcend organizations – people often maintain Mentor Coaching relationships even after they have left companies.

If Facilitator Coaching feels like it can be too time consuming, Mentor Coaching can occur as truly indulgent! It seems like it would take a big investment in both time and energy. But, in fact, people report that this is not the case. In practice, this is the kind of coaching that pays the Coach back – in terms of energy, fulfillment and a sense of truly making a difference with their time. In Mentor coaching, a little goes a long way.

The Benefits of Coaching

It seems obvious what the benefits of coaching are to the recipient: support and assistance in terms of achieving objectives. And those who are fortunate enough to connect with someone or several people who are interested in providing Mentor Coaching, benefit from an authentic connection and relationship with someone who sees their potential and is willing to support them in the fulfillment of their aspirations and dreams. This is a wonderful gift in the organizational world, and people always value the mentors in their life.

But there are some very real benefits for the coach, as well.

- **People will want to work with you.** As the "War for Talent"⁷ becomes increasingly acute, it is critical to be able to attract and retain talent. Given today's demographics, strong succession plans are key and many senior leaders are scrambling to find and keep top talent. Who doesn't want to work for someone that invests in him or her? Word gets around and you become known as someone people want to work for.
- **You build a stronger team around you.** When you practice coaching, as well as managing, your team members will be learning and developing beyond performing just to "get the job done." Your coaching investment will increase capacity in your organization because you will be tapping into potential that is yet to be realized, not just leveraging skills and talents that are already developed. As well, people will be gaining from the investment being made in them and this helps to balance the heavy performance demands on most workers in today's economic reality.

⁷ Term coined by McKinsey's in their 1997 survey in which researchers surveyed 6900 managers (including 4500 senior managers and corporate officers) at 56 large and midsize US companies. The update found that 90 percent of those surveyed thought it is more difficult to attract talented people now that it was three years ago, and 90 percent thought it is now more difficult to retain them. (The McKinsey Quarterly 2001, Number 2)

- **Your coachees become a network that expands beyond your immediate organization.** Ultimately, people who are coached, develop. They will leave your team or organization to go onto other opportunities. They become an extension of your network and expand your own sphere of influence. By practicing coaching, you are extending your own capacity to cause change within your organization.
- **You develop yourself as a leader and coach.** Business school and job experience teaches us how to manage – how to perform and get the job done. But management alone can wear you down. There has to be more to a career than continuous output. Most people need to "fill their bucket" as well as emptying it, as Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton so vividly illustrated.⁸ When you coach people to fulfill on their potential, something wonderful happens. You see what difference you can make, just by supporting and attending to another human being's dreams and aspirations. It often doesn't take much more than one or two hours a month to make this kind of a difference in another person's life. And there's nothing more fulfilling than seeing someone whom you've coached find success and happiness.
- **You learn that your value is less about what you do, and more about who you are.** Our actions and deeds speak loudly, but who we are for others is what leaves the most lasting impression. When we get to the end of our careers, most of us will remember the lives we affected and not the things we did. More importantly, that is what others remember us for.

Conclusion: An Art Form Worth Practicing

Coaching is a relationship phenomenon. Ultimately, it is about connecting with people and it takes artful communication skills, particularly listening. And while managing is a critical skill to ensure organizational performance in the short term, it is coaching skills that invest in the development of future leaders. Given the looming departure of a critical mass of the workforce, our future leaders will be stepping into a great deal of responsibility very soon. We have a window of opportunity to share wisdom and support through this period of the "changing of the guard," and the only way to ensure that happens is to include coaching as part of the repertoire. Managing alone will not leave enough behind for the future.

About the Authors:

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⁸ Rath, Tom and Clifton, Donald O. *How Full Is Your Bucket? Positive Strategies for Work and Life*; Gallup Press; 2004