What It Takes to Turn Managers into Coaches

WHITE PAPER

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Introduction

Coaching Is a Strategy and a Choice (Not a Chore)
Coaching requires that a manager take some responsibility for an employee's performance gap, and commit the time, resources and energy to work with the employee to bridge that gap.

Alas, up to 90% of managers have no desire to coach. It is a chore. They are focused upon advancement, focused upon day-to-day tasks, or are responsible for revenue generation and see coaching as taking them away from that priority. A good many dread coaching: they foresee a potentially emotionally charged conversation with a low performer.

When it is managed badly, coaching has all of those faults. But effective coaching can be learned, as can any other skill. When it is done effectively, significant benefits such as being able to delegate more tasks and the emergence of new high performers begin to manifest themselves.

In this paper we will take a deep dive into how the manager becomes an effective coach. We will cover the following components:

- **Defining what exactly coaches do**

- **Analyzing what your managers are doing now How coaching actually works**

- **Keeping managers motivated**

- **The investment required—The 10,000 Hour / 2-Year Challenge**

- **The importance of "face time" Defining outcomes**

- **The importance of commitment and when it is no longer a coaching conversation**

- **5 steps for getting started**

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Coaching Is a Coachable Skill

Recall the case study (called "A typical situation: "Try harder!") in the first white paper in this series. Joe is a newly-promoted sales manager who feels that any underperforming employee simply lacks commitment. This, despite the fact that Maureen, who is one of those underperformers, was a crackerjack marketer for the company, has superior product knowledge and an excellent rapport with her sales prospects. Also that Jason, one of the top performers, resents and avoids management from Joe and is ready to leave the company. Both employees have tremendous commitment, but neither has much confidence in Joe. Joe in turn is frustrated with his sales team, whom he blames for standing in the way of his advancement. His solution? Ride them hard. They will come around (if they know what's good for them).

Let us examine what happens when Joe expresses his frustration to his boss.

A Typical Situation

Peter Hardesty is the VP of Sales, and he has travelled from headquarters in Atlanta, Ga., too meet Joe in New Jersey. There is little Peter hasn't seen or done in his 11 years as a regional sales manager before he was promoted to VP. He is well respected for his balanced yet very ambitious and successful spirit, so, Peter is often sought out by junior and senior managers to run an idea through in order to get the best outcome.

"So it's no surprise to you, the numbers are down for the East Coast region," says Peter. Joe nods. "Do you have any theories why?"

"I do," says Joe. He proceeds to unload on Peter, who listens quietly, occasionally asking, "Anything else?" Joe complains bitterly about "Joe's Average Joes" and the underperformers. He tells Peter that the pressure of meeting quota is hard to bear. "I know we're not performing," he says. "Believe me Peter, it's not laziness on my part. I'm trying."

"I know you are," says Peter. "But you've just told me that seven out of your 10 people don't try hard enough. What do you think the solution is?"

"Giving it to them with both barrels," says Joe. "Maybe replacing the bottom three. Remember Jack Welch believes in firing the bottom performers."

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Peter nods. "What kind of coaching time do you spend with those seven?"

"I'm on the phone with them once a day," says Joe. "Phil, our lowest performer, is due here at the end of the week to hear the 'riot act.'"

"What do you usually tell those seven?"

"Usually I say something like, 'Quota is this, your numbers are only this, here's what I expect."

"And?"

Joe is silent.

"Let me point out three things," says Peter. "First, it's hard to believe that seven out of 10 people are just hog lazy. If laziness is the only explanation for not making numbers, then that makes you lazy. See my point?

"That brings me to a second point. A quota is a number. It isn't a skill that you can learn. It's not even an obstacle you can overcome. It sounds like you're not asking your people what's getting in their way. Do you?"

"I don't, really. Carl (Joe's Sales Director) kind of browbeat me, and I guess I do the same."

"Yeah," says Peter, "And you responded to that. But you're the rare person who does. My third point—and you may not like this—is that you need to get into the field more. Once a month at least with your average Joe's. And listen to them. Find out what's going on."

Here's what we'll do," says Peter. "Let's you and I have a standing appointment to talk on the phone, every day, five o'clock. I'll want to hear what's going on with your people in the field, and how you're advising them."

"Wait a minute," says Joe. "You're talking about coaching me."

"Of course," says Peter. "But not about selling. About coaching."

Joe is silent for a time. "This is humiliating."

"Why?"

"Coaching's for underperformers. And junior-level people."

Peter shakes his head. "Coaching's for anybody, . Yeah, younger people tend to need it more, but you can hit an obstacle at any point in your career. You were great on a team, Joe, you

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knew how to motivate your peers and you bothered to help them when they struggled. And you were great at closing. Those are two things you can teach people. But you're also a leader now, and that requires a whole new skills set."

Joe laughs cynically. "Why not just find someone who's better at it?"

"For the same reason you can't just replace seven of your 10 people," says Peter. "It would be demoralizing to the remaining three. And it would make us a lousy company to work for."

A Typical Situation: "You Want to Coach Me?"

Joe is managing to numbers and tasks—he is not managing people. If Joe handled his team differently what might his world (and his team's) look like instead?

Maureen, an underperformer with potential, would become a high performer, and Joe would have four top sales people, not three (or only two, if Jason leaves.) Joe would not be frustrated and fearful of failure, would perhaps even enjoy his current role rather than consider it a rung in the ladder of his upward climb. It might even help Joe climb that ladder faster. His team would not have sidebar conversations about Joe, would not be waiting for him to move on or thinking of moving on themselves, and would not be treading water in their performance. They might be out there working above and beyond to achieve both personal and professional success—might even work hard out of loyalty to Joe! In short Joe would actually be leading a high-performance team, rather than getting in its way.

How Coaching Really Works, and What it Achieves

Joe puts the impetus for improvement squarely on his employees. But coaching is about working in partnership with someone, being trusted, respected, and helping the other achieve personal and professional success. When you have listened to someone at a deep level, and helped another to solve problems, to make the most of opportunities, to plan next steps, to see perspectives they may not have considered, then you are coaching.

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Coaching is not simply cheerleading either; it is a continuous improvement methodology, one which produces measurable results. A study of Fortune 1000 companies[1] (provocatively subtitled "With Returns a CFO Could Love") revealed a return-on-investment of more than 500% in the cost of coaching programs. The survey discovered that coaching within those organizations produced these demonstrable results:

- **A 53% increase in productivity**
- **A 32% increase in retention of senior people**
- **Cost reductions of 23%**
- **A 23% increase in bottom line profitability**

Those same organizations reported improved working relationships between managers and direct reports; more effective team building and conflict reduction; and better business relationships with clients. These are intangible factors, but are behind those measurable successes like a 32% increase in retaining senior employees.

During the opportunities we have had to support companies aspiring to improve their coaching culture and subsequent positive impact, Atomus has seen many of the above benefits made real. Managers who are effective coaches can delegate tactical work to their protégés, which enables those managers to devote more of their time to such strategic work as planning, forecasting and gathering competitive intelligence. Also true, those managers develop a deep "bench" of talent, which is ready to step in when those managers advance. Because those employees have a chance for advancement, they are highly motivated to perform.

Those employees are motivated because coaching sends them the message that they are valued, valuable and trusted; they are far more motivated by appreciation than they are by any reprimand.

Stuck In the 1960s (And Before)

Despite all the evidence of the benefits and impact of coaching (about 37 million articles and other assets on an Internet search of "benefits of coaching"), it has yet to be broadly accepted as a superior and indeed preferred method than managing to numbers and tasks.

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Thomas G. Crane's book The Heart of Coaching includes an excellent section on the human case for coaching. It speaks to how we still operate under an autocratic, military style "command and control' model that worked when countries were at war. Douglas McGregor in his 1960 book The Human Side of the Enterprise describes Theory X and Y, by which management assumes that either all people are inherently lazy, uncreative and need clear direction and penalties and therefore need carrots or sticks to get them to do things.....and it is true—these approaches do have a time and place. But seriously—is that it—is that the best we can do for people?

Could we for a moment imagine that as human beings we could find the time, energy and inclination to invest in people? That we help people succeed both professionally and personally, that they can see how they make a difference for themselves, for the team, for the business, for the customer? That we as leaders give them time, share our visions, communicate clearly, challenge them, guide them, value them, reward them, listen to them, encourage them, help them learn and grow, and in turn receive the same consideration from our bosses?

Leaders today should be honestly baffled as to why managers persist in using wartime and arcane methodologies rather than nudging towards the 21st century and making extraordinary things happen for our businesses, our people and ourselves.

Part of the problem may be that companies do not yet value this most effective of human skills. But perhaps as well, they are unwilling to invest the time in this these skills?

The Investment Required – The 10,000 Hour / 2 Year Challenge

Talent is the subject of such bestsellers as Malcolm Gladwell's Outliers, Geoff Colvin's Talent is Overrated, and Daniel Coyle's The Talent Code. Each of these books leverages the work of Professor K. Anders Ericsson, who studied how expert performers achieve superior performance. Anders observed that expert performance requires what he called "Deliberate Practice." You need approximately 10,000 hours of practicing 'it' (be it playing violin, performing surgery, or becoming an effective coach) to get really, really good.

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Perhaps 10,000 hours is unrealistic to ask of managers (though those hours quickly add up), so thinking conservatively, let us assume that 1,000-1,500 hours enables you to become fair to good at some skill.

Let us look at a company looking for a quick fix to its coaching performance. We will assume that the average manager works 45 hours per week, which includes the manager coaching three employees, and spending two hours of coaching with each. That equates to a total of six hours. (By coaching we are talking about effective coaching, which is focused upon skills and behaviors versus tactics and numbers.) So:

> **49 working weeks in a year (allowing three weeks of vacation)**
> **x 6 hours per week = 294 hours of coaching per year.**

In effect, if no other training or reinforcement opportunity presents itself that manager will take four years of practice to become a reasonably good coach.

Great coaches need time to develop, need direction, and need recognition or rewards to stay motivated. Coaching cannot be learned in a 4 hour workshop or a short eLearning program on "how to write good coaching notes" (though both are certainly valuable ways to learn coaching and should be factored into the cumulative tally of time and skill development).

If your organization determines that:
- Coaching is important to the organization
- It is committed to developing the best talent it can find and invest in
- It wants extraordinary performance from its people

Then a useful goal is to set a minimum of two years of coaching-focused development in any employee (manager or front-line employees) where the emphasis is on tracking ability, continuous improvement, reward and recognition.

The good news is that if you allow managers the time to practice coaching, and if you hold them accountable for coaching, then you can shorten the timeline significantly. What you as a company treat as strategic and focus upon, will grow with a little nurturing.

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Define What Exactly Coaches Do and Analyze What Your Managers Are Doing Now

People need to be crystal clear on what coaches do.

Frederick Hudson's The Handbook of Coaching, takes a deep dive into the psychology and philosophy of coaching and coaches. It is a dense text, tough read for many, but the essence of Hudson's message is that coaches:

> "...are people who are trained and devoted to guiding others into increased competence, commitment and confidence. They motivate people around them with new hope, purpose and concrete steps for sustaining a cautious optimism. Effective coaches model the future because they are willing to invent it, design it and insist on it. They see change as an asset for getting the job done, rather than a reason to be afraid."[2]

Once your organization sets coaching targets, it is critical that people are tracked as to how they are actually delivering against those targets. Just as sales targets are scrutinized, coaching activity should be overseen and adjusted as needed.

Below is an example of how such active attention can reveal which managers are finding time to be with their people and to make a difference to the organization, and which are not. The final column details the number of times a manager actually created a coaching form/note that a direct report could access and review at a later date.

Manager Name	Actual Days Coaching Q3	Target for month Q3	% Actual Days vs. Target	Jul	Aug	Sept	Total Coaching Feedback Entries	Total Coaching Feedback Entries%
Jim Dunn	55	48	115%	18	15	22	55	100%
Lee Wright	10	48	21%	3	0	7	2	20%
Susie Morris	47	48	98%	23	5	19	45	96%
Jay Lee	30	48	63%	10	7	13	30	100%
Lisa Knight	39	48	81%	7	11	21	28	72%
Phil Warner	48	48	100%	16	22	10	48	100%

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Observe how many of these steps call for follow-up. Organizations invest enormous sums of money into developing their people—often focused upon technical skills. But training without follow-up is simply ineffective. Failure to coach an individual in the new skill results in 88% of that knowledge being lost within 60 days.

Time Between Coaching and Documentation
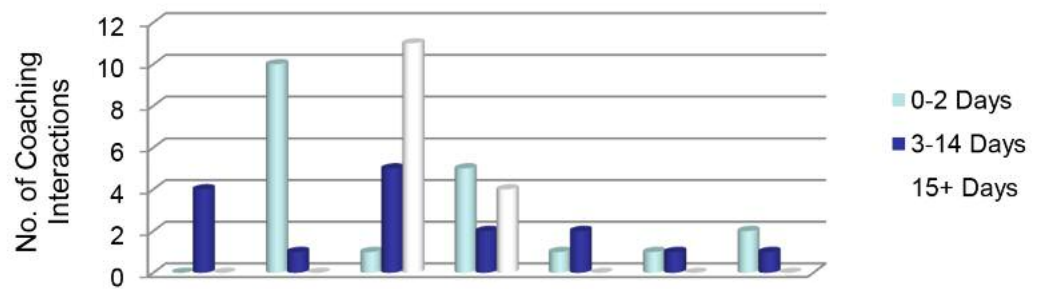
Coaching forms and notes have the most impact if completed and sent to an individual within 48 hours of a coaching conversation. The chart below shows that in this case it is only the minority of managers who actually do that.

We could cite many more real examples and at least 40 data points that we believe should be measured if you really want to understand coaching in your organization. The truth is until you start to look at what your managers are doing, you really have no idea what they are doing (and neither do they).

The bad news is that to extract this level of data regularly and easily into reports that make logical sense in a timely fashion you will need the assistance of an automated coaching tool. The good news is, once you start to review activity at this level, behaviors change, impact is realized and positive changes follow.

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The Importance of Shared Commitment

Thus far we have put the impetus for coaching squarely upon managers. But if coaching is to make any positive change, then the person you coach must be willing and able to learn from you—to listen, understand, and ultimately change their behaviors. Each must trust the other and know that you both invested in the employee's performance and ultimate success and are willing to take the time and effort to improve it. The slightest whiff of a lack of commitment, disengagement, ambivalence or confusion from either erodes that trust, and then you will be lucky for change to come slowly—if at all. This is called disengagement.

What is important when someone seems uncommitted is to acknowledge that both parties' needs play important roles in the long-term success of most relationships, and each deserves respect and consideration. It is also key that managers check inside their own heads and hearts to see where their commitment levels lie. In Joe's case, he believes that underperformers are uncommitted; but his commitment is to his own advancement, not that of his direct reports, indeed he even refutes the need for coaching for himself from his manager.

In workplace conflicts, differing needs are often at the heart of bitter disputes. Joe is frustrated with his direct reports, and they with him. When people can recognize the legitimacy of conflicting needs and become willing to examine them in an environment of compassionate understanding, it opens pathways to creative problem solving, team building, and improved relationships. Commitment must be 100% on both sides, not 100% divided between two people.

The Importance of Face Time

We have covered the importance of skills building (remember the 1,000 hours), and the impact great coaching can have. But here are some more statistics—and scary ones. The coaching consultancy Partners in Excellence conducted a survey in 2007[3], asking managers how frequently they had coaching/mentoring meetings with their people. For companies having revenue of $100 million or more, the survey revealed the following:

- 5% of managers had weekly coaching/mentoring sessions with their people
- 27% had monthly meetings
- 38% had quarterly coaching/mentoring meetings
- And the remainder held only annual meetings, or held no meetings with any regularity

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Smaller companies fared better with 46% of the managers having weekly or monthly meetings. But—and it is a big "but"—it is no wonder that we get into the messes we do if we never see our people. By the time we get to see or hear about an issue or concern, so much time has passed there is a sense of inevitability, or predetermined failure. That neglect is unfair to the employee and unproductive.

Keeping Managers Motivated

When managers do not practice coaching consistently and do not get rewarded for coaching, it is very easy for them to grow bored and ambivalent to the coaching process. Coaching becomes another chore that distracts them from their work and doesn't help anyone. You see a gentle sinking of enthusiasm initially and then—boom—no one is performing well. The exceptions may be those who were exceptional performers to begin with and do not know any other way. But they will eventually get angry and frustrated if their effort is not rewarded, if they see the better political players get advancement, if they know that those getting the accolades are earning that right by covertly following a different set of rules... and then, they leave.

So how can you keep people motivated, both managers and front-line employees?

- Help both managers and employees to understand what coaching is and how they can benefit from it
- Have managers receive coaching, and train them to coach others
- Ask managers to start coaching key staff members and to use coaching skills throughout the day Train people to coach others
- Reward and publicly recognize people for great coaching and make sure it is done frequently and in a timely manner, not once a year

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5 Steps for Getting Started

What steps then must an organization take to turn its managers into coaches? Atomus suggests five distinct steps:

STEP 1. Seek commitment from the highest level of the organization to create a coaching culture. Like any strategy, creating a coaching culture will take an investment of time and capital.

STEP 2. Train managers on what coaching is, and how to practice coaching deliberately, purposefully and consistently. There should be a standard coaching model, methodology and tracking system in place. Ideally, manager/coaches receive annual certification in coaching abilities, they are assessed by external coaches, and receive individual development plans created following the assessments. Scores/ratings should be measured for improvements and areas of training and development need.

STEP 3. Conduct regular, structured "coach-the-coach" sessions. These should be group sessions, with peer review of "case-studies" and if possible, professional external coaches as assessors.

STEP 4. Solicit regular feedback from the people being coached, to assess the coaches' ability to coach against specific competencies and leadership qualities.

STEP 5. Track, reward and recognize great coaching, and consider your approach if people aren't following the rules.

These five steps are not a one-time roadmap, but a continuous improvement methodology, akin to Total Quality Management (TQM), Six Sigma or lean manufacturing. Like those methodologies it must have mechanisms in place to repeat the process.

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Conclusion: Seek Motivation, Always

A catchphrase in managing a business change is to "seek employee buy-in." That guarantees success, as every employee, at every level, is eager for the change to succeed. Certainly a front-line employee is motivated to keep a job, but, managers must demonstrate that same commitment.

Managers, need to demonstrate a commitment to improvement by first assessing their own skills, as a coach and a manager. They need to understand first and foremost that they are in part, responsible for an employee's performance gap, and responsible for helping the individual for bridge that gap.

This in turn fosters trust with employees. If they understand that both parties are responsible for their improvement, and committed to that improvement, then as a rule managers will find that people do not resent coaching; they embrace it.

[1] Manchester Review, 2001, Vol. 6, 1; and Executive Coaching - With Returns A CFO Could Love
[2] Frederick M. Hudson, The Handbook of Coaching
[3] David Brock, "I Just Don't Have Time to Coach! A Crisis in People Development,"

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About Atomus

Atomus create software and mobile applications for businesses on the move. Atomus harness the power of "Cloud Technology" for their clients and use their unique in-house development skills to create and deliver business changing software. Atomus work with leading Pharmaceutical, Biotech, Media and Financial Organizations.

The "a:coach" field force coaching tool has been developed by Atomus over 10 years with input from leading experts and demanding global companies who understand the need to focus on improving customer interactions, deliver "on-brand" behaviors and enhance retention and pull through across their teams. a:coach is a powerful tool to launch, grow or re-invigorate a coaching culture.

Find out more about a:coach at www.acoach.net

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Glossary of Terms

Coaching - Individualized teaching, generally by a manager or peer, to develop an employee's specific skills or skills sets. Usually employed to rectify a performance gap, or develop new and needed skills.

Development - A combination of education, training and coaching generally targeting organizational, professional or personal goals. Development may be individual (employee development), or, more widespread (organizational development, human resource development).

Education - A knowledge-based understanding of a skill or subject. Different from training: An individual is educated about surgery in a classroom, but trained in the operating room.

Mentoring - Individualized teaching, in which a manager or peer shares specific expertise with protégés to develop a deeper understanding of, or greater effectiveness in, their current roles. Used to develop talent and cross-functional relationships, enhance collaboration and nurture in-house expertise.

Metrics - Specific measurements used to define an organization's coaching culture. Often numerical, but not exclusively. Examples include these:
    o What are our reps' three weakest skills across teams, and nationally?
    o What are the top three skills currently being coached in the field this month?
    o Are managers correctly using and implementing the organization's coaching and/or sales model on every call?

On-Boarding - Orientation for new employees, educating them in organizational processes (like reporting time and attendance, filling out expense reports).

Performance Gap - A difference between performance expectations and actual performance.

Process Reengineering - Altering a process to achieve organizational goals or rectify an organizational performance gap. In these cases, the process is "at fault" for underperformance, rather than employees.

Root-Cause Analysis - A systematized approach to identifying the cause of a defect (be it in product, process or employee performance). Generally an evidence-based approach, based on observation of a repeated phenomenon (like product defects from a particular machine).

Training - A performance-based learning of a subject or task, developed by doing. An individual is educated about driving in the classroom, but trained in the driver's seat.