

Clutterbuck Coaching and Mentoring International (CCMI) in partnership with Turner International Enterprises (TIE) are pleased to offer this virtual program. The aim of this program is to embody the presence of a team coach. You will be supported throughout the program by some of the most experienced team coaches in the world.

Team Coaching Practitioner

SESSION 2 WORKBOOK: PREPARATION –
CONTRACTING AND WORKING WITH OTHERS

Contents

- The team coaching framework..... 4
 - Key steps in the team coaching engagement 4
- The preparation stage..... 5
 - Readiness for coaching 5
 - How ready is this team for coaching?..... 5
 - What does performance mean for this team? 6
- The scoping and contracting stage..... 8
 - Contracting with the team leader..... 8
 - Contracting with a sponsor 8
 - Contracting with yourself 8
 - Contracting with the team individually..... 9
 - Contracting between team coaches 9
 - Contracting with the team collectively 10
 - The role of the sponsor 10
 - Contracting with the sponsor 11
 - Using diagnostics 11
- Contracting for external stakeholders 13
 - Contracting with the team leader..... 13
 - Agreeing with the team leader how to manage the team coaching session..... 13
 - Contracting with a sponsor 15
 - Contracting with yourself 15
 - Contracting with the team individually..... 16
 - Contracting between team coaches 16
 - Contracting with the team collectively 17
 - The role of the sponsor 17
 - Contracting with the sponsor 17
- Partnering with co-coaches in team coaching 19
- Team coaching in pairs 22
- The role of the 'second coach' in team coaching..... 23
- Process skills: learning how to use coaching 24
 - Preparation..... 24
 - Debate, discussion, dialogue 24
 - Listening skills 25
 - Five levels of listening 27
 - The four I's 28

Who knows what?.....	28
Some ground rules for presenting issues and listening to colleagues' presentations	28
Team coaching conversations	30
Process review	32
Process transfer.....	33
When not to coach a team	34
Is Team coaching right for this team?	36
Multi-stakeholder contracting.....	39
Contracting with the team leader.....	39
Agreeing with the team leader how to manage the team coaching session.....	39
Contracting with a sponsor	41
Contracting with yourself	41
Contracting with the team individually.....	42
Contracting between team coaches	42
Contracting with the team collectively	43
The role of the sponsor	43
Contracting with the sponsor	44

The team coaching framework

In this section we look at the overall team coaching framework, from the time you are asked to look at a team, to the end of the assignment. Though we will cover this in order, this is a non-linear process. If a team is ready for team coaching and has their issues defined, a typical team coaching assignment would involve up to 8 sessions with the entire team over the course of six to twelve months. Reflecting on a team, which you are familiar with, discuss in small groups how you would approach each of the seven steps below. What conversations would you need to have and with whom? Please see the Appendix for a blank version of the framework for your use.

Key steps in the team coaching engagement

Step	Team coach's action	Team's action
1. Preparation	Establish what performance means in this context Establish how ready the team is for coaching	Consider willingness and readiness for coaching
2. Scoping and contracting	Clarify goals and timescales How will we measure the outcomes of coaching? Map the principal barriers and drivers to: -- goal achievement -- coaching effectiveness	Understand and commit to specific performance goals – task, learning and behaviour
3. Process skills development	Help the team acquire basic skills of learning dialogue	Commit to and practice skills of learning dialogue
4. Coaching conversations	Lead the coaching dialogue	Create reflective space – calm time for coaching dialogue -- calm time for subsequent reflection, individually and collectively
5. Process review	Briefly review coaching process at end of each session Review in more depth every third session	Consider and give open feedback about the coaching process Consider how they can make it more effective
6. Process transfer	Assist team to take more leadership of coaching conversation	Take more leadership of coaching conversation Increasing emphasis on peer-coaching and team self-coaching
7. Outcomes review	Assist team to evaluate what has been achieved through coaching Give feedback on team's presentation to more senior management	Take responsibility for the outcomes of coaching and reporting them back to more senior management.

The preparation stage

Readiness for coaching

Thinking of a team you are familiar with, complete the questionnaire below. What do the scores tell you?

Consider how you might use this with a team:

- Would you ask them to complete the questionnaire as it is?
- Adapt it (if so how)?
- Discuss the questions in open forum?
- Work through the questions in one-to-one interviews?
- Not use it at all?

How ready is this team for coaching?

1. Do the team members have positive experience and expectations of coaching?
2. Does the team see team coaching as both urgent and important?
3. Does the team have an appropriate mix of complementary skills, relevant to its expected outcomes?
4. Are the team members genuinely committed to becoming a high performing team?
5. Are the team members – including the leader -- committed to open and honest dialogue?
6. Are they – including the leader – willing to challenge themselves and each other?
7. Are the team leader's motivations for introducing team coaching transparent and accepted by the team members?
8. Is it clear who is in the team and why?
9. Is team membership likely to change during the period of the team coaching?
10. Is the team willing to address and review its purpose and priorities?
11. Do team members genuinely want to collaborate rather than work in silos?
12. Does the team meet at least monthly?
13. Do team members accept responsibility for their own and their colleagues' learning and development?
14. Is the team adequately resourced (in terms of money, time, information, etc) to achieve its goals?
15. Is the team prepared to invest time into coaching sessions and into implementing necessary changes?
16. Is the team willing to address internal conflict?
17. Is the team prepared to address poor performance by individual members?
18. Is the team manager prepared to undertake personal change, to better support team performance?
19. Is team coaching supported by key stakeholders outside the team?
20. Are there any other significant barriers to making team coaching work?

Score 1 (Strongly no) to 5 (strongly yes)

Your thoughts

What does performance mean for this team?

Consider the following questions in the context of a team you are familiar with and try to answer them as honestly as possible. Consider also *What evidence do we have to answer this?*

- Do we know who our customers are? (Internal and external)
- Do we know what they want and need from us? (And do they know?)
- What's the quality of what we deliver? (Is it what they want/ need?)
- What reputation/ brand do we have with them?
- What do we do now that reinforces or undermines our reputation/ the quality of our work?
- Do we know specifically what needs to improve and how?
- Do we know what we are going to do to deliver those improvements?
 - Resources
 - Skills + competencies
 - Processes
 - Communication
 - Behaviours
- How will we know if we've succeeded or failed?
- Do we understand the difference between efficiency and effectiveness? (What are we doing efficiently that is hindering our performance?)
- Are we clear about which influences on our performance are within our control / influence; and which are not? How can we move the latter, so we can influence them?
- What have we not considered that might affect our performance next year?

Another approach is to ask the team: What are the five or six things this team has to do really well, to achieve its mission. Ask team members to write their lists individually, then share them. Your role as a team coach is to help them come to a consensus about what the priorities are and how they relate to the mission.

What range of responses would you expect from a team, with which you are familiar?

Your thoughts

How would you help the team come to a consensus?

Your thoughts

In what other ways would you prepare yourself and the team for team coaching?

Your thoughts

The scoping and contracting stage

A central issue in team coaching and essential in contracting is clarity of responsibility. There are typically four major stakeholders in externally resourced team coaching: the team; the team leader/manager; other team members (i.e., apart from the manager); and the sponsor. Issues that need to be foreseen and managed include:

- The team leader's behaviour or competence may be one of the primary reasons for poor team performance – hence there is a potential for conflict of loyalty
- The team and the leader may have different agendas, as may the sponsor
- Many teams are in fact composed of sub-teams, with considerable variation in their willingness and ability to collaborate – and with different agendas and priorities.

Contracting with the team leader

Consider the questions:

- *What conversation would best help you to understand the leader's intentions, motivations and fears?*
- *What commitments might you require from the leader and what might they need from you?*

Your thoughts

Contracting with a sponsor

- What conversation would help to ensure the sponsor is supportive and realistic in their expectations of the coaching intervention?

Contracting with yourself

- What can you do to protect your own well-being?
- How will you manage your own expectations?
- How will you manage boundaries?

Exercise: What contract can you set with yourself?

Your thoughts

Contracting with the team individually

Consider the questions:

- What conversation would best help you to understand each team member's intentions, motivations and fears?
- What commitments might you require from them and what might they need from you?

Your thoughts

Contracting between team coaches

You and your co-coach must role-model being an effective team. In contracting with each other, you may wish to consider, for example:

- How you will introduce yourselves and each other
- When and how to take over from each other
- When and how to make each other aware of a dynamic in the room
- How to observe and give feedback to each other
- How to work with each other's strengths and support each other's weaknesses
- How you will prepare for each session and how you will debrief after each session
- What you need from each other to feel confident

Your thoughts

Contracting with the team collectively

Consider the questions:

- *What conversation would best help the team contract together about how to make team coaching work for them?*
- *What contract might they need from you?*

Your thoughts

The role of the sponsor

Team coaches tend to be brought in to work with teams either by the team leader or, more frequently, by a more senior person, to whom the team leader reports. This latter person, usually referred to as a sponsor, may well have a different expectation of the team coaching process and the intended outcomes than do the team and/or its leader. Sometimes the HR function may be used as an intermediary between the sponsor and the team coach. It is important to insist on a conversation with the sponsor direct, because:

- The HR professional may unconsciously put their own spin on the assignment
- Sponsors often reveal far more to a coach, who knows the right questions to ask than they may to an internal HR person
- There is no hierarchical pressure between coach and sponsor

Clarifying expectations with the sponsor is vital in gaining their support and establishing a realistic picture of what can and can't be achieved through team coaching.

Contracting with the sponsor

Contracting with the sponsor tends to be mostly about an open conversation with the coach – ideally without other stakeholder's present, so they can be less guarded.

A typical contract might include the following:

[Coach] is employed to support the team in addressing a range of issues related to its performance, with particular but not exclusive reference to [topics]. The specifics of the conversations between the team and the coach, and between the leader and the coach, will remain confidential. The team will be encouraged to contract with the sponsor with regards to measurable outcomes they aim to achieve, and to the nature and frequency of feedback to the sponsor.

The coach guarantees to maintain confidentiality of all information derived in the pursuance of the team coaching assignment. It is not the role of the team coach to provide an opinion on the team, its members or its leader(s).

The sponsor is responsible for:

- Agreeing with the team and its leader the performance improvements sought from team coaching. These will be balanced between achievement of measurable targets, behaviours and systems improvements that support higher performance, and building the team's capability and capacity to address future challenges
- Supporting the team and its leader in addressing both the internal and external systems that influence performance

Using diagnostics

We have already encountered some diagnostic tools, which you can use to help the team understand itself and its context, and to identify issues to work on. There are others in the Appendix to this workshop. You will also have instruments that you already use in one-to-one coaching or other learning situations. It's advisable not to overload teams with questionnaires – that can create unnecessary resistance from the start. Better to start with one or two general ones, to pinpoint issues to work on, then to use other diagnostics to help the team understand its own dynamics later on in the assignment, when the questionnaires can be related to specific issues you are addressing.

In the space below, list diagnostics relevant to team coaching, along with what would be best time and way to use them.

Diagnostic tool	When and how would you use it?

Contracting for external stakeholders

A central issue in team coaching and essential in contracting is clarity of responsibility. There are typically four major stakeholders in externally resourced team coaching: the team; the team leader/manager; other team members (i.e., apart from the manager); and the sponsor. Issues that need to be foreseen and managed include:

- The team leader's behaviour or competence may be one of the primary reasons for poor team performance – hence there is a potential for conflict of loyalty
- The team and the leader may have different agendas, as may the sponsor
- Many teams are in fact composed of sub-teams, with considerable variation in their willingness and ability to collaborate – and with different agendas and priorities.

Contracting with the team leader

Consider the questions:

- *What conversation would best help you to understand the leader's intentions, motivations and fears?*
- *What commitments might you require from the leader and what might they need from you?*

Your thoughts

Agreeing with the team leader how to manage the team coaching session

It's easy to forget how much the team leader has to make a leap of faith in trusting a team coach to work with his or her team. Among the (very rational) fears the leader may have are:

- Will the team coach usurp my authority?
- Is the session going to become a gripe session against me?
- Will the conversation bring into the open issues I'm not ready to discuss openly?

It is essential to have a pre-conversation with the team leader to prepare for how you will work together to make the coaching a success. Ideally, the role of the leader is to:

- Observe and learn
- Let the team do as much of the talking as possible
- Intervene in ways that will support co-learning (i.e., be careful not to close open conversation down)

On the agenda should be:

- Who will facilitate the conversation, at which points?
- Who will open the session and outline its purpose?
- How will the coach signal the leader, when his or her interventions are unhelpful? (If the team coach does nothing, the team members will feel less safe and become less open. If he or she puts down the leader, everyone is embarrassed and it will take time to recover.)
- How will the leader signal the coach, if he or she feels the conversation is going in the wrong direction?
- How will the leader role model the behaviours that make for good co-learning and co-coaching?
- What are the “no-no” actions for the leader to avoid? These include:
 - Talking too much
 - Closing down team members’ when they speak
 - Seizing control of the flip chart (and hence re-establishing who is in charge)
 - Setting a poor example, such as checking their i-phone while others are talking

Regular breaks for tea or coffee provide an opportunity to review with the leader, how he or she is feeling and where to steer the conversation next.

Your thoughts

Contracting with a sponsor

- What conversation would help to ensure the sponsor is supportive and realistic in their expectations of the coaching intervention?

Your thoughts

Contracting with yourself

- What can you do to protect your own well-being?
- How will you manage your own expectations?
- How will you manage boundaries?

Exercise: What contract can you set with yourself?

Your thoughts

Contracting with the team individually

Consider the questions:

- *What conversation would best help you to understand each team member's intentions, motivations and fears?*
- *What commitments might you require from them and what might they need from you?*

Your thoughts

Contracting between team coaches

You and your co-coach must role-model being an effective team. In contracting with each other, you may wish to consider, for example:

- How you will introduce yourselves and each other
- When and how to take over from each other
- When and how to make each other aware of a dynamic in the room
- How to observe and give feedback to each other
- How to work with each other's strengths and support each other's weaknesses
- How you will prepare for each session and how you will debrief after each session
- What you need from each other to feel confident

Your thoughts

Contracting with the team collectively

Consider the questions:

- *What conversation would best help the team contract together about how to make team coaching work for them?*
- *What contract might they need from you?*

Your thoughts

The role of the sponsor

Team coaches tend to be brought in to work with teams either by the team leader or, more frequently, by a more senior person, to whom the team leader reports. This latter person, usually referred to as a sponsor, may well have a different expectation of the team coaching process and the intended outcomes than do the team and/or its leader. Sometimes the HR function may be used as an intermediary between the sponsor and the team coach. It is important to insist on a conversation with the sponsor direct, because:

- The HR professional may unconsciously put their own spin on the assignment
- Sponsors often reveal far more to a coach, who knows the right questions to ask than they may to an internal HR person
- There is no hierarchical pressure between coach and sponsor

Clarifying expectations with the sponsor is vital in gaining their support and establishing a realistic picture of what can and can't be achieved through team coaching.

Contracting with the sponsor

Contracting with the sponsor tends to be mostly about an open conversation with the coach – ideally without other stakeholders present, so they can be less guarded.

A typical contract might include the following:

[Coach] is employed to support the team in addressing a range of issues related to its performance, with particular but not exclusive reference to [topics]. The specifics of the conversations between the team and the coach, and between the leader and the coach, will remain confidential. The team will be encouraged to contract with the sponsor with regards to measurable outcomes they aim to achieve, and to the nature and frequency of feedback to the sponsor.

The coach guarantees to maintain confidentiality of all information derived in the pursuance of the team coaching assignment. It is not the role of the team coach to provide an opinion on the team, its members or its leader(s).

The sponsor is responsible for:

- Agreeing with the team and its leader the performance improvements sought from team coaching. These will be balanced between achievement of measurable targets, behaviours and systems improvements that support higher performance, and building the team's capability and capacity to address future challenges
- Supporting the team and its leader in addressing both the internal and external systems that influence performance

Partnering with co-coaches in team coaching

Benefits of coaching in pairs

- Sharing the parallel tasks of facilitating the group and observing the group dynamics
- Each coach has frequent breaks from intense engagement with the team, so they remain fresh
- Being able to step in when a colleague is stuck (for example, pointing out a group dynamic and asking the team what they would like to do about it)
- More effective debriefs than when one coach reflects on their own

Roles of a coach

- Taking notes – for example, interesting words or phrases used by the team, interactions between group members (you may want to represent these as a diagram), ideas for new exercises, feedback for your coach colleague
- Providing in the moment support
- Monitoring the energy in the room

Choosing a co-coach

- What skills, knowledge and experience do you bring?
- What do they bring?
- How will you integrate these?
- What most matters to you in such a partnership?

Getting to know each other.

- How did you become you? (Your formative narrative)
- What are your deepest values as a coach and as a person?
- What role do you want team coaching to play in your professional life and your development as a human being?
- What scares and what elates you most about team coaching?
- What do you value about each other?

Contracting with:

- Sponsor
 - Team leader
 - The team individually and collectively
 - Yourself
 - Your co-coach
-
- How do we move from “contracting” to “enlarging”?

Preparing for a team coaching session

- The 3-way conversation (coaches + team leader)
- Preparing a session plan based on interviews, diagnostics and observations
- How much structure do you need? How can you balance
- structure against experiment and “learning in the moment”?
- How will you ensure psychological safety for everyone (including yourselves)?

- How will you distribute the power (yours, the team leader's,
- individual team members, sub-groups, etc)

Role modelling being a team

- What are the key behaviours you want to role model?
- What behaviours do you want to avoid as a coach pair?

When and how will you intervene:

- To support your "front of house" colleague?
- To press the "pause" button to bring a group dynamic to attention?
- When else?

Learning from your co-coach

- Set learning objectives for every team coaching session together
- Contract to give each other feedback after the session and during breaks
- Have a Team Learning Plan for yourselves
- Agree to share one new idea you have gained from reading or elsewhere, each time you meet
- Agree what you will take to supervision together
- Do not confuse peer feedback with supervision

Reviewing a session

- How well did we role model coaching behaviours?
- What changed for this team?
- What didn't change?
- What dynamics (e.g., subgroups, avoidance of issues) did we see?
- How smooth were our handovers?
- What challenges did we meet and how did we address them?
- What lessons can we draw now?
- What do we need to reflect upon?
- What do we want to thank each other for?

How will you build your collective resilience?

- There's no room for blame (of self or each other) in team coaching?
- Things don't go wrong; they just don't go as expected – and that is valuable learning
- How can we be kind to each other and ourselves?
- How can we de-stress after each session? (Make it a shared goal to laugh within the first five minutes.)

Build your practice with diverse co- coaches

- Working with the same person builds shared trust, appreciation and instinctive responses to what is happening in the room
- Working with a different co-coach challenges our assumptions and introduces us to different approaches

Team coaching in pairs

Team coaching is a very demanding activity. It is increasingly the norm that team coaches work in pairs. The benefits of doing so include:

- Sharing the parallel tasks of facilitating the group and observing the group dynamics
- Each coach has frequent breaks from intense engagement with the team, so they remain fresh
- Being able to step in when a colleague is stuck (for example, pointing out a group dynamic and asking the team what they would like to do about it)
- More effective debriefs than when one coach reflects on their own

In choosing a co-coach, it is helpful to look for someone with complementary skills and personality. You can learn a lot from each other and they will observe things you do not.

When you are the “back of room” coach, you can add value to the process by taking notes – for example, interesting words or phrases used by the team, interactions between group members (you may want to represent these as a diagram), ideas for new exercises, feedback for your coach colleague.

As a team of two, you can also role model being an effective team. Share notes and brief each other at coffee breaks. Demonstrate the skills of listening, supporting creative thinking and giving feedback to each other. However, in giving feedback to each other, be careful not to give the team the impression you are in disagreement or disarray – practical experience here indicates that the team needs to feel confident that you know exactly what you are doing. Share the fact that you have a team development plan, but not what is in it, as again, this may undermine the team’s confidence in you.

The role of the 'second coach' in team coaching

Good practice guidelines in team coaching suggest that there is always a team of two coaches in the room, unless the team is small (four or less people). The reasoning here is that it is impossible for the coach leading the conversation to be aware of all the complex dynamics. Having a second pair of eyes and ears promotes both more effective interventions in the moment and deeper reflections and learning after the coaching session. The second coach can also intervene, if the "front of room" coach gets stuck.

However, it may not be obvious to the team why they need to pay for two coaches. It helps, if there are frequent changeovers of role between the coaches. But equally, it is important that both the coaches and the team understand what the role of the second coach is.

The key functions of the second coach include:

- **Maintaining focus:** Indicating when the conversation is steering too far away from the purpose, which the team agreed they wanted to address
- **Acknowledging:** There are two main aspects here. Acknowledging emotions is about recognising that a group member has feelings that need to be respected – especially if these relate to psychological safety. Generally, these will need to be addressed in the moment, before gaining permission from the individual and the team to continue. Acknowledging issues is about ensuring that a team member feels that they are heard, even if what they are saying is off topic. The second coach may say something like: "I'm going to capture that, so we address it later."
- **Follow up:** Making sure that anything that has to be parked is not forgotten.
- **Checking in:** Pausing the process from time to time to direct attention to dynamics in the room – for example, when one team member seems to be side-lined, or when the team is not sticking to its agreed rules for behaviour
- **Signalling:** Giving their coach colleague (and / or the team leader) encouragement or directing their attention to one of the team.
- **Analogising:** Offering analogies that may help the team's thinking
- **Open capturing:** Scribing on the flip chart, when it is not appropriate for a team member to do it
- **Closed capturing:** recording key words, questions that did and didn't work, interpersonal dynamics, energy flow, pivotal moments and other observations that may be useful in post-session reflection

This collection of tasks and roles requires a high level of attentiveness. To the team, it might look like a subsidiary role, but it is at least equal in intensity and complexity to the "front of house" coach. Experienced team coaches learn to share the roles fairly equally, recognising the importance of being adept at both.

Process skills: learning how to use coaching

It often happens that a team turns up for team coaching with the expectation that the coach will be doing most of the work. This stage of the assignment is important in that it addresses the skills that will be needed by the team to make the most of the team coaching session. Effective team dialogue involves:

- Preparation – everyone needs to reflect beforehand on:
 - The significance the topic has for them individually and as a team
 - Their experience and the learning they take from that experience
 - The evidence they have for the assumptions or conclusions they make about the issue (How substantial is it? Of what quality? How current?)
- Intensive listening and a genuine interest in other people's opinions
- Avoiding "groupthink" (where people suppress their own views in order not to confront, or to lose face)
- Constructive, considered and empathetic challenge
- Clarity about decisions made and where accountabilities lie for acting on decisions

Here are some practical activities you can use to help a team improve the quality of its dialogue.

Preparation

How prepared are you for this team coaching session?

Ask everyone to reflect for a few moments on the questions:

How ready are you to:

- Be open to others?
- Be open to yourself?
- Be curious?
- Be inventive?
- Be challenged?
- Challenge others?
- Challenge yourself?

Let them share their thoughts as openly as they can with their team colleagues.

Comments

This exercise is best done in a circle, so that everyone can interact with everyone else. Allow time for everyone to reflect and allow everyone to choose when to speak. Acknowledge the validity of wherever people decide they are. If they are not fully ready in one or more aspects, ask what would help them become more so and discuss this.

Debate, discussion, dialogue

Invite the team to discuss the difference between debate (objective = to win an argument), discussion (objective = to find an acceptable compromise) and dialogue (objective = to

create new learning/ new meaning.) Capture a list of behaviours and processes that would ensure that the emphasis of the coaching sessions lies with dialogue.

Listening skills

Some of the key principles of effective listening are neatly summarised in Nancy Klein's book *Time to Think* as:

1. **Paying attention** -- listening with respect, interest and fascination
2. **Asking incisive questions** – to challenge assumptions that block the quality of thinking ideas; keeping the focus on questioning rather than on speaking
3. **Equality** -- treating each other as thinking peers, by taking turns in speaking and by maintaining boundaries, such as personal space
4. **Appreciation**—typically a five to one ratio of appreciation to criticism
5. **Ease** – giving the other person the sense that you have time for them
6. **Encouragement** – not feeling you have to compete with them for air time; using body language that encourages the other person to talk
7. **Feelings** -- Recognising the place of emotion and expressing emotion as a key part of the conversational exchange; using emotional release to maintain the quality of thinking
8. **Information** -- Enquiring sufficiently to understand the issue from the other person's perspective
9. **Place** -- Creating a physical environment that reinforces mutual regard
10. **Diversity**-- Using difference as a positive factor (a source of interest in the other person rather than a reason to be wary of them)

To these can be added genuineness (being yourself, not acting a part); and avoiding the natural tendency to analyse what has been said or to devise a clever response (effective listening is as much about what you don't do as what you do).

Talk the team through these characteristics and ask them to discuss: *what can we do to ensure that we apply these to the way we listen in our team coaching sessions?*

These principles also apply to this workshop. What listening (or poor listening) behaviours do you see in this group?

Positive listening behaviours	Poor listening behaviours

Five levels of listening

There are at least five types of listening:

1. Listening to disagree
2. Listening to respond (which includes framing a question) or record
3. Listening to understand
4. Listening to help someone understand
5. Listening without intent

Listening to disagree is based on the needs of the listener to be heard and valued. Listening at this level is highly selective and it involves identifying words, phrases and ideas that can be seized upon and used against the other person.

If you recognise you are being drawn into this level of listening, the following questions can help to re-establish your focus:

- On whose behalf am I listening?
- What parallel process is happening for me, which I need to “park”?

Listening to respond or record seems on the surface to be very helpful. However, it diverts attention to our own thoughts, experiences and stored memories. Finding a helpful question or suggestion may seem appropriate, but what often happens is that the speaker’s thinking progresses as they talk, making our intended intervention obsolete before it is voiced.

Listening to understand draws the focus to the speaker’s intent (what are they trying to say and why?) and meaning (what overt and hidden implications are there?). This level of listening requires more experience and confidence in the listener.

Useful questions here are:

- What is the person trying to say?
- What are they trying not to say?
- Are my own experiences and associations helping or hindering me in interpreting what they are saying?
- What is the logic of what is being said?
- What emotions are involved here?
- What meaning is emerging for me and for the speaker?

Listening to help someone understand goes a step further in shifting our attention from ourselves to the speaker. This level of listening helps another person become more aware of their own thinking processes; the meaning that they attach to words, phrases, concepts and symbols; the emotional currents colouring their perceptions and behaviours; and the interplay between all of these.

Useful questions include:

- How aware is the speaker of what is happening within them and around them?
- What would help them improve the quality of their thinking and feeling?
- What do I need to avoid in order not to interrupt their growing awareness?

Listening without intent aims simply to support someone in the conversation they need or want to have with themselves, with the minimum of intervention by the listener. This is not easy! Especially when letting go even of the need to think about the next question (thinking about what to ask next can be a huge distraction). The listener has confidence that, at the moment an appropriate question is needed, it will emerge of its own accord. If no question does emerge when the speaker stops, then a period of silence and reflection usually helps to allow the process to continue.

This level of listening can be compared with sleeping on a problem and finding a solution when you wake up.

Useful questions that help us listen without intent include:

- What will help me achieve stillness without turning to my own thoughts?
- Am I attending with all my senses?

Highly experienced listeners admit to finding themselves in each of the five levels of listening at times. They tend to centre on listening to help someone understand, but they spend time in each session both above and below this level.

You can ask the team to experiment by becoming more aware – as they hold a conversation about any topic – of which levels of listening they are operating at. Over time, this will help them shift their “centre of gravity”.

The four I’s

Summarising at the end of a coaching conversation can be much more effective, if it is structured around headings of *Issues, Ideas, Insights and Intentions*. Encourage the team to practice this whenever they conclude conversation around a topic.

Who knows what?

Research into how groups and teams discuss topics and make decisions finds that they spend more time and pay more attention to knowledge that everyone shares (common knowledge) than to the knowledge than one or two people bring. Team coaches can help the team create the habit of asking:

- What do we *all* know about this?
- What do only some of us know about this?

Some ground rules for presenting issues and listening to colleagues’ presentations

In preparation to share some information, it helps to ask oneself the following questions:

- What exactly is the issue here?
- What learning do I want to gain from this presentation?
- How can I present it succinctly, to help my colleagues help me?
- How clear am I about what I want from them?

When you are presenting, consider:

- How clearly am I explaining this?
- When would be the best point to ask for input from the group members?

After the discussion, you can reflect with the group:

- What have I learned?
- What actions can I now take?
- What options have opened out for me?
- What feedback would you like to give me about how I presented the issue?

When you present the issue again at another session, consider:

- What specifically did I do as a result of the previous conversation?
- What has changed?
- What went the way I expected it to and what didn't?
- What learning have I already taken from that?
- What is the issue now?
- What do I now need from the group?

When listening to a presentation

- Accord your colleague all the respect and attention you would wish to receive, when you present
- Allow them time to explain their issue before you ask questions
- Seek first to clarify – don't jump to solutions or advice until the issue is fully understood and in context
- Don't talk across each other
- Try to make each question or comment count
- Reflect upon the learning you can extract from this presentation.

Team coaching conversations

The team coaching session tends to follow a clear structure. One that provides consistent and thoroughness is described in the nine steps below:

1. Contracting for the session: what responsibilities do we have to each other?
2. Overarching goal: How does this issue fit with our team mission or purpose?
3. Define the issue. Why is it important now?
4. Context: Understand the system(s)
5. Redefinition: How has our understanding of the issue changed?
6. Seeking individual and collective mindshift: What do we need to let go of and embrace?
7. Alternative ways forward: What [additional] options do we have?
8. Decisions: Including deciding not to decide
9. Re-contracting: What has changed in our understanding of how we need to work together on this issue? How will we keep on top of this issue in the future?

Activity: Working in small groups, discuss how you would manage each of these stages move the session on from one stage to the next.

Stage	How you would manage it	How you would move it on
Contracting for the session		
Overarching goal		
Define the issue		

Context		
Redefinition		
Seeking individual and collective mindshift		
Alternative ways forward		
Decisions		
Re-contracting		

Process review

After every two or three sessions, it is important to review with the team how it has absorbed the team coaching mindset and behaviours. How would you go about this?

Your thoughts

Process transfer

Your responsibilities as a team coach include making yourself obsolete as soon as possible, by ensuring that the team gradually takes over the management of the coaching conversation. Failure to do this can make the team dependent on you and push the relationship towards consulting facilitation.

Consider and discuss these questions:

- How will you prepare the team to take over responsibility for the coaching process?
- How will you know that this is happening?
- What can you do if the team is slow to own the process?

Your thoughts

When not to coach a team

Just as happened with coaching individuals, as team coaching becomes more mainstream, the assumption emerges that it is some kind of cure-all for team problems. Of course, it's not, but team coaches increasingly bring to supervision issues relating to how they manage client team and sponsor expectations about what can and can't be delivered.

It all starts with getting to know the team and its situation before contracting with them. Experienced team coaches know the danger signs to look for and when they should say no to an assignment. Here are some of those signs:

1. When there is no compelling rationale for being a team – for example, when members of a group have little interdependence
2. When it is too large to be a real team – above eight, it will become harder to gel as a team; above 12, social loafing and other dynamics will be a major impediment to performance
3. When only the leader wants team coaching to happen
4. When the team leader is weak – for example, unable to deal with dissension. In such circumstances, the team coach can easily find themselves in the role of surrogate leader
5. When the team expects you to rescue them, or for you to find the solutions to their problems instead of working things out themselves. If they won't take responsibility for the process or the outcomes, you are liable to become the scapegoat when things don't work out
6. When the team has no prospect of acquiring the resources it needs to succeed
7. When you are a stakeholder in the team – any real or potential conflict of interest can undermine your effectiveness
8. When you have close relationships with some members of the team, but not with others
9. When the team's problems are pathological – deeply unhealthy teams will find it impossible to engage with the team coaching process.

The initial scoping interviews with members of the team provide the opportunity to identify potential red flags. Interviews with key stakeholders and observers of the team provide another, valuable perspective.

If you find a red flag, explore your concerns first with the team leader and the assignment sponsor. If they are not prepared to acknowledge the issue(s) and work with you on them before the formal coaching begins, then walk away. If they will not let you take the issue to the rest of the team, individually or collectively, walk away. If you feel that the complexity of the problem is beyond your competence, walk away. In each case, if you explain clearly the reasons for your concern, you are likely to emerge with greater respect and self-respect than if you take on an assignment that has failure built-in!

Once you start a team coaching assignment, keep your eyes open for signs that the team may be uncoachable in its current form and be prepared to confront the team with your observations. "This is my observation. What do you want together to do about it?" Recontract regularly and reiterate the limitations of team coaching, where appropriate.

If you do find yourself coaching an uncoachable team, don't panic. It happens to all experienced team coaches at some time. Think of it as an occupational hazard of the role—like a sports injury is for an athlete! Extract yourself as soon as you can, and put some quality time into reflecting on the learning you can extract from the experience.

Is Team coaching right for this team?

Here are some cases of team situations. The table below illustrates how an outsider might see the teams' issues from linear, systems or complex, adaptive systems perspectives.

The tired team

"If I'm honest", says the team leader Flavian, "I'd say that pretty much the whole team demonstrates the Peter Principle. They have been promoted to the point of their incompetence. Technically, they are all very competent. But as managers and leaders... I am constantly asking them why they are spending time doing tasks that their direct reports could do, but that's their comfort zone. They don't like strategy work and frankly, they are out of their depth when they try. I did bring in a younger, more visionary member to the team, but she quit after a few months saying she was tired of not getting through to them." "It doesn't help that their job roles don't involve a lot of task interdependence – they and their own teams don't need to reference anyone else but me. I am under a lot of pressure from my Exco colleagues and the CEO to "fix" them. Firing them all and starting again would be too disruptive and we are not that kind of company. How can you help?"

The merged team

Overall, the merger of the two real estate businesses has gone surprisingly well. A year after the merger, however, the IT team is struggling to come together. There is no obvious conflict, but at lunchtimes, the members who came from the smaller merger partner – all of them under 25 – sit separately from the team from the larger partner, who are from a slightly older generation. A manifestation of this divide is the frequency of rework that has to be done as a result of miscommunication and misunderstandings. These in turn cause delays and the team leader is under pressure from above to get work back on track before the next phase of systems integration.

The dispirited team

A tobacco company's subsidiary in South America is trying to reinvent itself. The global company sees great opportunity in moving from an industry that kills people to one that cures them. The emphasis of all research and investment is moving into using vaping technology to deliver metered doses of medicines. But the bulk of income still comes from the core cigarette business, which is under pressure to deliver higher profits to finance the new strategy. The production team for cigarettes is despondent. They no longer feel valued – all the recognition is going to people in the new ventures – and they have missed targets for four successive quarters. "No-one has any time for us now," says the team leader. The sponsor – a regional director – asks you what you could do to re-motivate the team and emphasises that they will not have any extra resources. He explains: "It must be hard having been the kingpin in the organization, and now to be just a cash cow. But that's the reality and they have to learn to live with it."

The too busy team

Doh! is a quirky, fast-growing artisan bakers, supplying upmarket restaurants and eateries. From a garage start-up, it now has more than 200 staff baking and delivering bread. It is negotiating with a national supermarket chain to supply 100 stores in a pilot that could lead to massive expansion. Just four years old as a business, it lacks a lot of processes that would be expected in a more mature company. Its HR team has expanded in the past 12 months from one HR manager and an assistant to a team of eight. All of them are "run off their feet" trying both to make up for the lack of process before and to prepare the

company for the future expansion. At team meetings there is usually at least one person absent because they are dealing with a crisis. Says the team leader: "At our last meeting, one of the team said to another: 'I didn't know you had kids!'. When we got to talking, we realised that we hardly know each other at all. As an HR function, we are supposed to promote human values in the business, but we aren't setting a good example."

The Olympic team

Whenever a country hosts the Olympic Games, it has to create an organization to project manage the event. The headcount swells to hundreds or thousands until the Games are over and everyone goes home – then shrinks to a much smaller rump, whose task is to manage the aftermath. This may include repurposing sports venues, or in some cases demolishing them, finding new uses for accommodation blocks and so on. One of the big challenges is keeping people engaged when they know they have soon to look for a new job. How do we stay as a team, when one by one we are leaving?

	Linear	Systemic	Complex, adaptive systemic
The tired team	Time has passed these people by. The leader needs to get tough with them	What is it about this team's relationship to its stakeholders and the wider system that encourages and gives it permission to behave in this way? What conversation does the team leader need to have with his direct reports to move them from being as group to being a team?	What conversation does the team leader need to have with the team so that they engage with the needs of wider system? What changes in the wider system would require the team members to either change or go? How can the team leader engage with the wider system so that it exerts an influence for change?
The merged team	We have efficiency problems. They could be solved, if people talked together more.	What holds these subgroups together? What do they have in common and differently? What happens in the triangular relationship of leader/subgroup A / subgroup? How could understanding those dynamics lead to better co-working?	How does this team mirror the intergenerational divide across society? What can we learn from other intergenerational situations that might inform our thinking? And what learning might we be able to share with other such situations?
The dispirited team	We have to motivate people	We have to find better ways to connect the team to the organizational purpose	We have to find better ways to interweave our past, present and future narrative with those of our current

		and the wider eco-system	and future stakeholders.
The too busy team	We can create more team spirit if we get to know each other better	Team spirit will be best generated by addressing the whole internal team system - - our purpose, how we work together and how we value and support each other	How can we extend our establish greater collegiality and mutual support with the organization as a whole?
The Olympic team	We need to work together to wind up efficiently	How do we leave a lasting legacy for all those who helped make the Games a success?	How do we engage with and enhance future Games, including those not yet decided?

Multi-stakeholder contracting

A central issue in team coaching and essential in contracting is clarity of responsibility. There are typically four major stakeholders in externally resourced team coaching: the team; the team leader/manager; other team members (i.e. apart from the manager); and the sponsor. Issues that need to be foreseen and managed include:

- The team leader's behaviour or competence may be one of the primary reasons for poor team performance – hence there is a potential for conflict of loyalty
- The team and the leader may have different agendas, as may the sponsor
- Many teams are in fact composed of sub-teams, with considerable variation in their willingness and ability to collaborate – and with different agendas and priorities.

Contracting with the team leader

Consider the questions:

- *What conversation would best help you to understand the leader's intentions, motivations and fears?*
- *What commitments might you require from the leader and what might they need from you?*

Your thoughts

Agreeing with the team leader how to manage the team coaching session

It's easy to forget how much the team leader has to make a leap of faith in trusting a team coach to work with his or her team. Among the (very rational) fears the leader may have are:

- Will the team coach usurp my authority?
- Is the session going to become a gripe session against me?
- Will the conversation bring into the open issues I'm not ready to discuss openly?

It is essential to have a pre-conversation with the team leader to prepare for how you will work together to make the coaching a success. Ideally, the role of the leader is to:

- Observe and learn
- Let the team do as much of the talking as possible
- Intervene in ways that will support co-learning (i.e. be careful not to close open conversation down)

On the agenda should be:

- Who will facilitate the conversation, at which points?
- Who will open the session and outline its purpose?
- How will the coach signal the leader, when his or her interventions are unhelpful? (If the team coach does nothing, the team members will feel less safe and become less open. If he or she puts down the leader, everyone is embarrassed and it will take time to recover.)
- How will the leader signal the coach, if he or she feels the conversation is going in the wrong direction?
- How will the leader role model the behaviours that make for good co-learning and co-coaching?
- What are the “no-no” actions for the leader to avoid? These include:
 - Talking too much
 - Closing down team members’ when they speak
 - Seizing control of the flip chart (and hence re-establishing who is in charge)
 - Setting a poor example, such as checking their i-phone while others are talking

Regular breaks for tea or coffee provide an opportunity to review with the leader, how he or she is feeling and where to steer the conversation next.

Your thoughts

Contracting with a sponsor

- What conversation would help to ensure the sponsor is supportive and realistic in their expectations of the coaching intervention?

Your thoughts

Contracting with yourself

- What can you do to protect your own well-being?
- How will you manage your own expectations?
- How will you manage boundaries?

Exercise: What contract can you set with yourself?

Your thoughts

Contracting with the team individually

Consider the questions:

- *What conversation would best help you to understand each team member's intentions, motivations and fears?*
- *What commitments might you require from them and what might they need from you?*

Your thoughts

Contracting between team coaches

You and your co-coach must role-model being an effective team. In contracting with each other, you may wish to consider, for example:

- How you will introduce yourselves and each other
- When and how to take over from each other
- When and how to make each other aware of a dynamic in the room
- How to observe and give feedback to each other
- How to work with each other's strengths and support each other's weaknesses
- How you will prepare for each session and how you will debrief after each session
- What you need from each other to feel confident

Your thoughts

Contracting with the team collectively

Consider the questions:

- *What conversation would best help the team contract together about how to make team coaching work for them?*
- *What contract might they need from you?*

Your thoughts

The role of the sponsor

Team coaches tend to be brought in to work with teams either by the team leader or, more frequently, by a more senior person, to whom the team leader reports. This latter person, usually referred to as a sponsor, may well have a different expectation of the team coaching process and the intended outcomes than do the team and/or its leader. Sometimes the HR function may be used as an intermediary between the sponsor and the team coach. It is important to insist on a conversation with the sponsor direct, because:

- The HR professional may unconsciously put their own spin on the assignment
- Sponsors often reveal far more to a coach, who knows the right questions to ask than they may to an internal HR person
- There is no hierarchical pressure between coach and sponsor

Clarifying expectations with the sponsor is vital in gaining their support and establishing a realistic picture of what can and can't be achieved through team coaching.

Contracting with the sponsor

Contracting with the sponsor tends to be mostly about an open conversation with the coach – ideally without other stakeholder's present, so they can be less guarded.

A typical contract might include the following:

[Coach] is employed to support the team in addressing a range of issues related to its performance, with particular but not exclusive reference to [topics]. The specifics of the conversations between the team and the coach, and between the leader and the coach, will remain confidential. The team will be encouraged to contract with the sponsor with regards to measurable outcomes they aim to achieve, and to the nature and frequency of feedback to the sponsor.

The coach guarantees to maintain confidentiality of all information derived in the pursuance of the team coaching assignment. It is not the role of the team coach to provide an opinion on the team, its members or its leader(s).

The sponsor is responsible for:

- Agreeing with the team and its leader the performance improvements sought from team coaching. These will be balanced between achievement of measurable targets, behaviours and systems improvements that support higher performance, and building the team's capability and capacity to address future challenges
- Supporting the team and its leader in addressing both the internal and external systems that influence performance