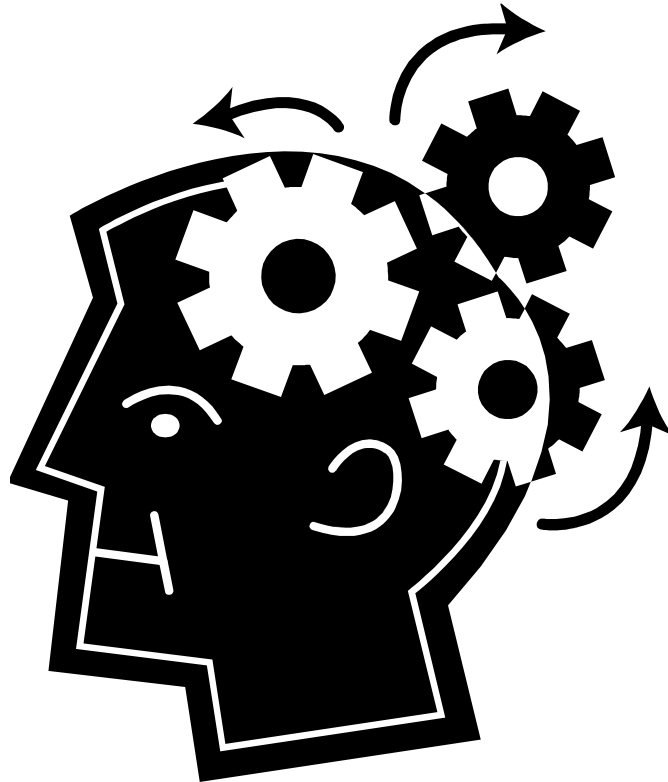


THE BRAIN AT WORK: COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS THAT DRIVE POSITIVE CHANGE

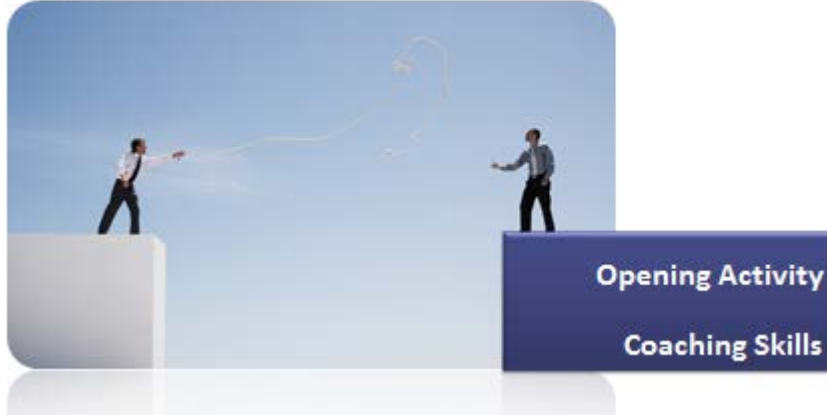


**Facilitated by David Byers
OBFS Training, Performance Development, Communications and Policy**

Participant Supplement

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Introduction



Based on your experience, identify the competencies of an effective coach or someone who helped you succeed and record them below. Then share these with people at your table.

EFFECTIVE COACHING COMPETENCIES

TOPIC 1: EFFECTIVE COACHING

“While no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a career, a company, relationship, or a life, any single conversation can.”
– Susan Scott

Effective Coaching Qualities:

1. High level of integrity: *do what you say, say what you do, live by example.*
2. Confident: *focus on what is possible, not what can go wrong. Courageous enough to say what needs to be said.*
3. Mindful communicator: *direct simple language, words chosen for maximum impact.*
4. Committed to other people: *aware of your own judgments, show each employee belief in their potential and that you are not threatened by their success.*
5. Insightful: *listen at all levels, listen to your own intuition and express it to employees, challenge yourself to think creatively.*
6. Coachable: *assess your own coaching skills honestly, look for the next level, ask employee for feedback on your performance and listen to it. Continually developing your coaching skills.*

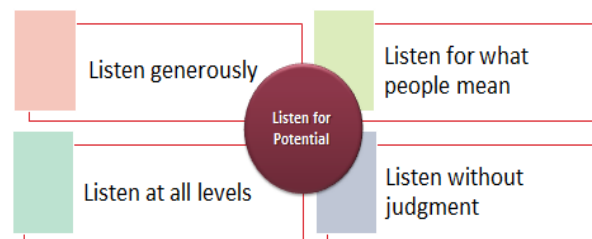
Effective Coaches Have the Ability to:

1. Determine needs: *look at the current reality.*
2. Listen for potential: *seek to understand from the other’s view.*
3. Asks questions that promote insights: *questions that help the employee think and see better.*
4. Clarify for meaning: *express the core essence of what is said.*
5. Speak with intent: *provide succinct, specific, generous information best for employee.*
6. Set goals: *determine the actions needed for change.*
7. Gain accountability: *create conditions where employees choose to follow through.*

TOPIC 2: FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

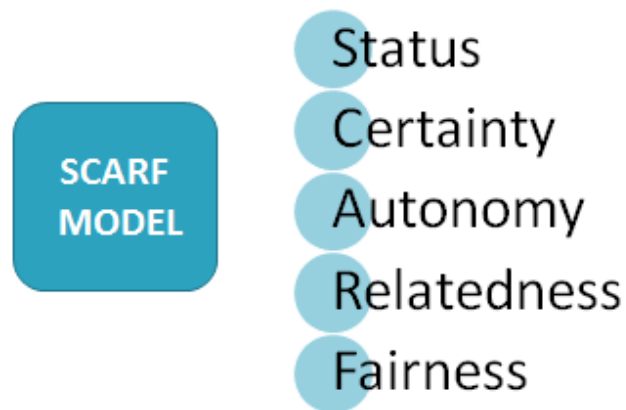
Listen for Potential

Being a great listener is essential to being a great coach. This skill underlies most competencies of a great coach, which includes being insightful, mindful and committed to others. Listening for potential is focusing on *a person's strengths, goals, possibilities and potential*. People naturally listen for problems or gaps. Conversely, listening for potential involves listening generously, at all levels, for what people mean and without judgment.



- 1) **Listen generously** – requires the manager's full attention, and involves trying to view the situation from the employee's perspective; listening without interrupting and reacting, while allowing the employee to develop their own conclusions and insights.
- 2) **Listen for what people mean** – it is estimated that 20-50% of the time, we don't actually hear what people mean, especially what they precisely mean. This requires listening without assumptions and not filtering the data from our view, where we can distort or delete vital information the employee is trying to convey.
- 3) **Listen at all levels** – listen to the words, listen for emotion, listen for body language. All of these will help you understand the meaning of what your employee is saying.
- 4) **Listen without judgment** – it is easy to react to some things your employee may be sharing. Managers need to realize that they are no longer listening when they are reacting emotionally to something their staff says. Be aware of your judgments and be willing to put them aside while seeking to understand your employee.

TOPIC 3: BRAIN SCIENCE



- ◆ **Status:** When people realize that they may compare unfavorably to someone else, the threat response kicks in, causing some of the same effects as sleep deprivation and anxiety. *Status can be elevated by praise or when people master a new skill. Status can also be elevated when a manager recognizes an employee's development efforts. Seeking permission to have the conversation and on which direction to go in the conversation puts people on equal status.*
- ◆ **Certainty:** The minute the brain registers ambiguity or confusion, it reacts with a threat response. Working memory is diminished and tension is present. The perception of uncertainty frequently undercuts focus and performance. *Placement helps you and your employees know where you are and where you are going in a conversation. This increases certainty for the employee.*
- ◆ **Autonomy:** Studies show that the degree of control available during stressful situations determines whether the stressor will undermine the ability to perform. As long as people feel they can execute their own decisions without much oversight, stress remains under control. A perception of reduced autonomy can easily generate a threat response. By contrast, the perception of greater autonomy increases the feeling of certainty and reduces stress. *Permission facilitates autonomy with your employees as does involving them in identifying the problem, solution and plan for success.*

- ◆ **Relatedness:** Fruitful collaboration depends on healthy relationships which require trust and empathy. In the brain, the ability to feel trust and empathy is shaped by people perceiving they are part of the same social group. *Leaders who strive for inclusion and minimize situations in which people feel rejected create an environment that supports maximum performance. Sharing how you feel about your employee's performance, being generous, helps you relate to your staff and builds trust.*
- ◆ **Fairness:** The perception that an event has been unfair generates a strong response (fight or flight), stirring hostility and undermining trust. As with status, people perceive fairness in relative terms. In organizations, the perception of unfairness creates an environment in which trust and collaboration cannot flourish. Like certainty, fairness is served by transparency. *Leaders, who share information in a timely manner keep employees engaged, motivated and demonstrate fairness. Being succinct, specific and generous promotes transparency and also promotes trust and fairness.*

NOTES

Brain Facts (Read on your own and record your thoughts at the bottom of the page.)

- 1 The brain is a connection machine – the brain makes millions of connections each second. The brain wants to connect, and when we are unable to make a connection we have an impasse. Coaching helps people resolve impasses that they have not been able to solve.
- 2 No two brains are alike – everyone has a unique set of connections for how they think about things. How you solve a problem is just how you would solve a problem, but other people are likely to use different mental pathways.
- 3 The brain hardwires everything it can – new ideas or behaviors use working memory, a very limited resource in the brain. Therefore, any behavior, thought or activity that is repeated becomes hardwired so we don't have to pay attention to it. Coaching involves getting people out of automatic thinking and into a more conscious view. This takes significant effort.
- 4 Hardwiring drives automatic perception – our perceptions are driven by deeper hardwired circuits and old habits, much more than by receiving data fresh from the world. As a result, people perceive according to their beliefs and attitudes, rather than seeing things as they are or could be.
- 5 It's practically impossible to deconstruct our wiring – attention itself creates change in the brain. So trying to get rid of circuits is often ineffective and ends up deepening them instead. This explains why focusing on problems creates more awareness of problems, whereas focusing on solutions creates more solutions.
- 6 It's easy to create new wiring – the brain creates new connections all the time. The key, if we want to create a long-term circuit, new belief and new habit, is to pay lots of attention. Attention, in the form of quality and quantity of focus, is what changes the brain over time.

NOTES

TOPIC 4: RESULTS COACHING

The Dance of Insight Examples

Improving Performance (Initiated by Manager)

Permission

"I need to talk with you about a problem. When would be an open time for you?"

"I have a suggestion on how you can improve. Are you interested in hearing it?"

Placement

"I would like to talk about the problem you are having with completing the project. It should take about 30 minutes."

"Now that we have examined some alternative solutions, let's set some goals on how to solve this problem."

Thinking Questions

"What do you think you need in order to perform better at this?"

"How can you improve your performance?"

"What do you think is your next step?"

Clarifying

"So you feel you do not understand what is expected of you?"

"You don't seem to be motivated to tackle this problem?"

Facilitating Great Performance (Initiated by Employee and May be Manager Initiated)

Permission

"Is there something you would like to talk about now?"

"Would you like to brainstorm some ideas on how to solve this problem?"

Placement

"Since we have determined the nature of your dilemma, let's explore some possible solutions."

"Let's now create an action plan."

Thinking Questions

"How long have you been thinking about this problem?"

"On a scale of 1-10 how satisfied are you in your thinking?"

Clarifying

"Essentially you feel stuck between helping the customer and meeting your other goals?"

"Basically you're concerned about being considered for a promotion?"

Communication and Coaching Tools For Collaborative Conversations that Drive Positive Change

Listening for Potential is focusing on *a person's strengths, goals, possibilities and potential*. It involves listening generously, at all levels, for what people mean, and without judgment.

Speak with Intent involves being succinct, making every word count and cutting to the heart of the issue when communicating. It also includes being specific which helps others understand exactly what you mean. It includes being generous, which is taking extra effort to ensure the listener sees totally where you are coming from. It is speaking for the listener's benefit rather than for yours.

Clarity of Distance is listening from the employees' perspective without interrupting, reacting and passing judgment. It is when we put our own biases aside and therefore help our employees see things more clearly from a different vantage point.

The Dance of Insight helps managers and employees succeed through employees finding their own ideas and developing solutions. It uses *Permission, Placement, Thinking Questions, and Clarifying*.

Mindfulness is paying attention to one's own thinking process in the present. This helps managers be fully attentive and aids their brain development to know themselves better. Thus managers are able to better support employees in becoming more self-aware and self- appreciative.

Name it and Tame it is a mindful technique that involves acknowledging your emotions or thoughts that are occurring and agreeing to put them aside. This allows one to be fully present.

Reframe is choosing to take a different look at a situation, one's thinking, or emotions, or beliefs in order to see more sides and opportunities.

Solution Focus versus Problem Focus is choosing to view a situation from the perspective of identifying the solutions and not the problems. It is about saying "What needs to happen to move forward?" instead of "Why did this happen?" It causes less threat response in a conversation and provides more options to find solutions.

References and Additional Resources

Readings

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Training Opportunities: For OBFS employees who would like more information on the course

"Coaching: Collaborative Conversations that Drive Positive Change" contact Dave Byers

at davbyers@illinois.edu, 217-333-2401.

All others contact the Center for Training and Professional Development

at www.trainingcenter.illinois.edu, 217-333-8342.