

Coaching for Development: A 5-STEP PROCESS FOR ACCELERATED RESULTS

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Coaching is one of the fastest growing professions today, experiencing explosive growth and becoming an increasingly popular method for improving performance and sustaining action and learning.

Individuals are hiring coaches to become more satisfied professionally, create a better quality of life, or fulfill a lifelong dream. Organizations are hiring coaches to develop and retain future leaders, improve management behaviors, and produce better bottom-line results.

First, let's clarify what we mean by "coaching." According to the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, coaching is a "relationship between a Coach and a willing individual inside or outside of an organization that is built on respect, safety, challenge, and accountability." This relationship motivates all involved to perform at the highest level of competency and to achieve meaningful, profitable results in both business performance and life.

The origins of coaching are found in fields as diverse as human resources, sports counseling, industrial/organizational psychology, adult learning and development, and management consulting. Borrowing from these roots, professional coaching has emerged as a solution-oriented

approach to changing behaviors, involving new ways of thinking and acting. Unlike counseling, coaching does not focus on resolving past conflicts and issues. Coaching also differs from consulting in that a coach stays with the client to help implement new skills, changes, and goals to make sure they really happen. Traditional managing and mentoring are also different from coaching: the former involve using expertise as a means to help, while the coaching process is founded on the belief that the expertise lies in the coachee, not in the coach.

Currently, six out of ten organizations are offering coaching as a way to improve performance and achieve better business results. As law firms continue to add career coaches to help minimize associate departures and increase career satisfaction levels, law firm administrators can benefit from adding coaching skills to their portfolios and help increase the competitiveness of their organizations. Similarly, law school career services professionals can realize far-reaching benefits from using coaching as a way of producing results, helping students define and chart career paths and assisting alumni with navigating ongoing career challenges.

As a way of introducing how coaching works, this article presents the coaching model we use

to help professionals practice and solidify important coaching skills. This is a helpful guide for conducting a coaching session, and consists of five stages: gathering, connecting, strategizing, focusing, and assessing. We have also included a hypothetical coaching scenario throughout to further demonstrate how coaching skills can accelerate change and move an individual to action. Please note this is only an example and all characters and exchanges are fictitious.

STEP ONE: GATHER

This is an important first step in the coaching process, also considered the discovery phase. Here the coach needs to understand the coachee's goals and motivations. By asking powerful questions, the coach is empowering the coachee to establish the agenda for the session. Asking questions is an essential tool in order to find out more about coachees' motivations, needs, and objectives.

Susan is responsible for lawyer professional development. Kevin is a fourth-year associate who has come to her for direction.

Kevin: Thank you, Susan, for taking the time to see me today. I really appreciate it.

Susan: Sure! How can I help?

Kevin: I decided to finally set up a meeting with you because I don't know what to do next. My assignments have always been exciting and I've enjoyed being with the firm. I like the people I work with, but for the past several months I feel like I have gotten off track somehow.

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Susan: It sounds like you have been giving this a lot of thought. What do you think changed?

Kevin: Well I'm not sure. To tell you the truth, I've been giving a lot of thought to my future here, and while I think I am on track for partnership, I'm not really sure. I feel my evaluations have always been good and I've consistently met my billable hour requirements, but I don't know if this is good enough to get me there, and I could use your help in figuring this out.

STEP TWO: CONNECT

After gathering helpful information that allows the coach to determine the coachee's perspective, the second step involves empathizing with the coachee. Reflecting and clarifying ensure that both the coach and coachee are on the same page. In addition, modeling the coachee's behavioral style is a way to make sure both the coach and coachee are moving forward together. Connecting with the coachee is important to building a relationship of trust.

Susan: I know it can be difficult to evaluate next steps and part of my job is to help you clarify where you are and find fulfillment here as a valuable member of the firm.

Kevin: I am willing to work at this, and the time is now.

Susan: That's good to hear. Now let's talk about your goals.

STEP THREE: STRATEGIZE

At this stage in the process the coachee is ready to start working on established goals. In order to do this, an important element needs to be introduced into the relationship: collaboration. It is essential that the coach and coachee agree on how to achieve goals since the coach will be instrumental in helping the coachee identify and overcome barriers in the pursuit of coaching objectives.

Susan: I heard you say that you are doing all that is required to stay on track, but at the same time I also hear the hesitation and needing to do more. Is that correct?

Kevin: Yes it is. I want to become a partner and I am here to see what else I need to do to separate myself from the others.

Susan: How would you feel about brainstorming some things that you can do that can help separate you from your colleagues?

Kevin: That would be great.

STEP FOUR: FOCUS

The fourth step is to move the conversation to action/solution. At this stage the coach and coachee create and implement an action plan connected to developmental goals. Sometimes stretching the coachee to accept challenging goals is necessary for action to occur. Action steps are so important to the coaching model because without them the exchange is merely a conversation that is absent of accountability.

Susan: What are two action steps that you will take based on the brainstorming exercise we just did?

Kevin: I will connect with my mentor to see what else I can do, and I will talk to another partner at our firm with whom I am friendly to see what he suggests as ways to differentiate myself from others.

Susan: How might I know that you have done this?

Kevin: I will let you know the next time we meet.

STEP FIVE: ASSESS

This final step helps to measure the progress against the goals that were established. Maintaining accountability and movement is necessary to sustaining momentum and moving the coachee forward. Showing progress is important for the coachee to continue to stay engaged.

Susan: How did your action steps go?

Kevin: I had my two conversations and both were insightful and helped give me some direction on what I need to do next. I learned that there is more I can do to help ensure that I do become partner.

Susan: Good job on the action steps. What would you like to talk about now regarding your goal to make partner?

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Note: This coaching relationship would continue as long as Kevin is continuing to move forward with his goals and is making progress.

The 5-Step Coaching Model is an excellent example of how coaching can help unlock potential, increase motivation, and accelerate results. Rather than counseling, managing, or mentoring, the above scenario demonstrates the use of powerful questions on the part of Susan as a way of helping Kevin act on his agenda with her support. Her abilities to gather enough information to break down the reason behind his visit, to focus him on next steps, and to empower him to take action yield better, faster results.

It is not surprising that coaching is quickly becoming the 21st century solution to creating future leaders, implementing career self-management strategies, and optimizing personal and professional satisfaction levels. At a time when law firm and law school professionals are facing increasing demands to do more in less time yet still produce measurable results, effective coaching skills can play an instrumental role both in career development and in achievement of organizational goals. Coaching not only offers a rich and unique development opportunity but also provides new tools to enhance personal and professional excellence. ■

