



A division of General Physics (UK) Ltd  
[www.clutterbuckassociates.com](http://www.clutterbuckassociates.com)

# Creating a coaching climate

© Clutterbuck Associates 2011

**Professor David Clutterbuck**  
**Practice Leader**

Clutterbuck Associates  
Grenville Court, Britwell Road,  
Burnham, Buckinghamshire SL1 8DF  
Main Office: +44 (0)1628 606 850  
Email: [info@clutterbuckassociates.co.uk](mailto:info@clutterbuckassociates.co.uk)

# Creating a coaching climate

Every significant study of effective managers concludes that those managers who get the most out of their teams spend a high proportion of their time and energy coaching others. Effective managerial coaches are able to delegate more, to create a stronger sense of purpose within the team and to motivate the performance of others. Even more important, perhaps, they free up time so that they can focus on the most important tasks, instead of fire-fighting or doing jobs that could be done by their direct reports.

The stark reality, however, is that most managers put very little effort into coaching. Even though the company may have provided coaching training for them, unless there is a robust coaching climate, there will be very little overall impact on the performance of the business, on retention of talent, or on the achievement of strategic goals.

So what exactly is a coaching climate? You will know you have a coaching climate when:

- Personal growth, team development and organisational learning are integrated and the links clearly understood
- People are able to engage in constructive and positive confrontation
- People welcome feedback (even at the top) and actively seek it
- Coaching is seen as a joint responsibility of managers and their direct reports
- There is good understanding at all levels about what effective developers and developpees do
- Coaching is seen primarily as an opportunity rather than as a remedial intervention
- People are recognised and rewarded for their activity in sharing knowledge
- Time for reflection is valued
- There are effective mechanisms for identifying and addressing barriers to learning
- People look first inside the organisation for their next job (a typical average would be that only one in five does so!)
- There are strong role models for good coaching practice



So how do you create a coaching climate? At Clutterbuck Associates, who have been researching this topic for nearly two decades, some of the answers are:

- By ensuring that all managers have at least the basic skills of coaching
- By equipping all employees with the skills to be coached effectively
- By providing an Advanced Coaching Skills programme for senior managers and HR staff
- By developing a cadre of master coaches – people with a natural talent for developing others, who are willing to take on the additional tasks of being a role model, coaching less able peer managers in coaching skills and, in some cases, being an upward coach to more senior managers
- By providing opportunities to review good coaching practice
- By recognising and rewarding managers who demonstrate good coaching behaviour and commitment to coaching
- By measuring and providing feedback on the quality, relevance and accessibility of coaching
- By ensuring that top management provide strong, positive role models
- By identifying cultural and systems barriers to developmental behaviours

#### **Ensuring that all managers have at least the basic skills of coaching**

Just running a training course isn't enough. Managers need to put what they have learned into practice. Initial training needs to be reinforced with opportunities to review each coaching session and to reflect upon feedback from the coachee. Good practice typically involves either follow up group sessions or the use of a master coach to sit in on coaching sessions and provide immediate feedback.

#### **Equipping all employees with the skills to be coached effectively**

CA's research indicates that coaching works best when the coachee is both a willing and an informed participant. The more the coachee understands about the coaching process, the easier it is to help the coach help them. For example, effective coachees learn how to phrase questions in ways that will elicit the kind of help they want.

Greater impact can also be gained by regarding coaching as a team activity (most coaching is actually done by peers, not superiors, anyway) and engaging the whole team in learning how to make coaching a day to day activity.

#### **Providing an Advanced Coaching Skills programme for senior managers**

The more senior a manager is, the more important it is that they coach well – the costs of mistakes and lost talent rise exponentially the higher up the organisation one goes. An Advanced Coaching Skills programme builds on the existing knowledge and competence of the manager, providing a range of techniques and approaches that broaden his or her portfolio of responses. In some cases, a whole day is devoted to practising these techniques, with expert feedback to each pair from a master coach, who observes them.



### **Developing a cadre of master coaches**

CA's master coach programmes last a year and aim to equip these internal managers and HR professionals with a wide enough experience of coaching and related developmental approaches to tackle most problems they may encounter, both as coaches in their own right and in helping other managers grow in coaching skills. As a group, they also provide a valuable resource of experience to support each other and less experienced coaches.

The core process is action learning – participants share the learning burden and explore issues together in a series of one-day meetings. There are also opportunities for contributions of knowledge from outside experts. At the end of the programme, they have the confidence and competence to act as real champions for coaching.

### **Providing opportunities to review good coaching practice**

Bringing coaches – of all levels of experience – together from time to time helps to spread good practice and remind people of what is expected of them. This is particularly true around the time of annual appraisal. A coaching practice review can help managers prepare direct reports more effectively for their appraisal, and this extract much greater value from it.

### **Recognising and rewarding managers who demonstrate good coaching practice**

If managers who do not coach or invest significant effort in developing others still receive promotions and high rewards, it sends a very negative message. Some organisations are now making developmental performance an integral part of their succession planning and annual bonus systems.

Measuring and providing feedback on the quality, relevance and accessibility of coaching  
It's important to have a clear picture of what coaching is happening and how effective it is, especially from the perspective of the coachee. Identifying pockets of good and poor practice allows for remedial action.

### **Ensuring that top management provide strong, positive role models**

Top management can choose to be coached by a professional external resource, by a peer, or by someone more junior, who can educate them in other perspectives. (This is especially useful when the more junior person comes from a different gender or racial origin.)

A positive example from the top is critical. Unless people see that top managers are investing in their own development and in coaching others, their own motivation will inevitably be muted.

### **Identifying cultural and systems barriers to developmental behaviours**

The excuses managers give for not devoting sufficient time to coaching or to encouraging coaching between members of the team are many. Top of the list is usually inadequate time and much can be achieved by helping managers develop better skills of prioritising, general time management and establishing regular and sacrosanct periods of reflective space.



Other barriers to coaching behaviour are often more subtle – for example, a general reluctance to address difficult behavioural issues, or to admit to weaknesses. Initial research to establish these most common such barriers can prove invaluable. From this understanding, it is possible to conduct educational and motivational campaigns and to coach managers to overcome their own specific barriers.

Also highly relevant is the perception by managers of overall supportiveness of the organisation towards development activity. Again, this is something that can be measured and used as a broad benchmark of progress towards a coaching culture.

### **The need for a coherent approach**

Establishing a coaching climate, then, requires a much more concentrated, integrated approach than most companies have applied. For real change to happen, managers need a progressive level of skills improvement, just-in-time sources of advice, pressure from coachees, positive role models and a supportive environment.

Cost-wise, however, such an approach may be less expensive than continually training and retraining managers, who continue to behave largely as they have always done. It is certainly more likely to produce results.