



Values Based Leadership

Developing Inspirational Leaders

The Manager as Coach

A Sustainable Way of Leading

by Karen Frost



There are times when, as a manager, you need to be very directive and authoritative in your managerial style. When there is a crisis or tight deadlines, or when the behaviour of a team member is inappropriate. However, for the majority of time, using a coaching style of leadership can be a very effective approach. So what exactly does it mean to be 'The Manager as Coach' and why is this style of leadership sustainable?

During coaching sessions I have often heard a client say that it is too time consuming to use a coaching style and it is quicker to simply tell

someone what to do. Whilst this may be quicker to reach an immediate solution, this approach is not sustainable. When consistently 'telling', a manager is restricting a member of staff from developing but when using coaching skills in their approach a manager can encourage and develop a member of staff, which is ultimately better for both the leader and the led.

So how do Managers use this approach? Managers as coaches have a set of qualities evolved from self-awareness and people skills development that they use daily:



Values Based Leadership

Developing Inspirational Leaders

- The ability to build trust and rapport
- Strong listening skills
- A variety of questioning skills
- The ability to read body language
- The ability to give effective feedback
- Reflection
- Humility
- And knowing when to give advice or suggestions.

They also know when to be more direct and because this approach is used relatively infrequently, it is recognised as an unusual behaviour and is therefore taken more seriously or acted upon quickly.

The skills of the Manager as Coach are even more relevant now as businesses are starting to see growth. Frequently managers tell me that there has been a switch from a crisis of low profit margins and lean cultures to a more productive and positive environment. In addition, the demographics of countries such as the UK, US, Germany and France indicate that large numbers of people will be retiring over the next 5 years - so the demand for good managers will increase. Whilst other countries like Russia, China and India do not have these demographic considerations it would be wise to remember the adage 'people leave leaders not organisations'; so there is always a place for the Manager as Coach in any culture and at any time.

So how best to learn the skills of being a Manager as Coach?

It is fundamental to start with the attitude that it is a positive thing to be a manager with a coaching style. Then look for a role model around you who has a natural coaching style or listen out for someone who has changed their managerial approach during their career to a more coaching style. Use these observations and go out and develop your coaching skills, or, as is sometimes the case, rekindle them and start using them again.

I listed the most valuable qualities of a Manager as Coach earlier in the article and it is these qualities that you need to practice. Select people in your team that you think will respond especially well to a coaching style. Tell these people what you are doing and why. Create a few sentences about what you are doing with this style of leadership and let people know what you think the benefits will be for you and for them. Get feedback on your style; no one can develop in a vacuum. Then reflect, modify and practice. Use some humility to get it right and remember, don't give up. It takes a while to experience the benefits of being a Manager as Coach because it requires long term behavioural change. However, it is well worth it in the long run.