

## Conversion of a coaching sceptic

Please excuse me for not writing on topics de rigueur - crunches, crises and collapses. Instead, let me share some insights from recent coaching and mentoring (C&M) professional development I undertook.

I've tended to be a coaching sceptic: ask a series of questions, paraphrase, reflect and ask more questions. Limited ability for me to share my experiences or pass on advice. Or so I thought.

Here are some of my key takeaways from the course:

- Don't let a problem always be the catalyst for considering C&M
- Active listening requires practice
- Coaching shouldn't be used when performance management is actually the solution
- When exploring problems it's very difficult not to make assumptions
- Coaching can be an effective tool strategically as well as operationally

Of the six fundamental areas of skill needed to be competent in coaching (known as the six gateways) two were unexpected:

Guiding: including the ability to respectfully pass on advice, make requests or suggest

Challenging: including the ability to give direct, clear and constructive feedback

### Why consider coaching?

It's an investment in you or your employees. Not only should it increase an individual's motivation and effectiveness but it should also promote retention. It sends a message akin to "You're important to this organisation, we believe in you and we want to develop you".

### Which of your employees should receive coaching?

I advocate investing resources in to your top performers or those you have identified as having potential to be top. Anecdotal evidence shows we spend too much time trying to get improvement in poor performers – for the purpose of making them average performers?! By continuing to advance the abilities and effectiveness of your top performers you create what I call "performance stretch". This raises the bar as to what is possible (and expected) and will naturally result in an increase in workforce performance throughout your organisation.



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### Coaching: internal or external providers?

All managers would benefit from attending professional development to become proficient in the skills and methodology of coaching and mentoring. This could lead to them undertaking formal coaching with staff or to integrate the skills learnt in to everyday management practice (known as informal coaching). Obviously engaging with an external person to provide formal coaching brings more experience to the table and their independence may be a useful dynamic in some coaching situations.



