Boost

Lead Manage Coach

From *The Principles and Art of Successful Business Coaching* | Myles Downey
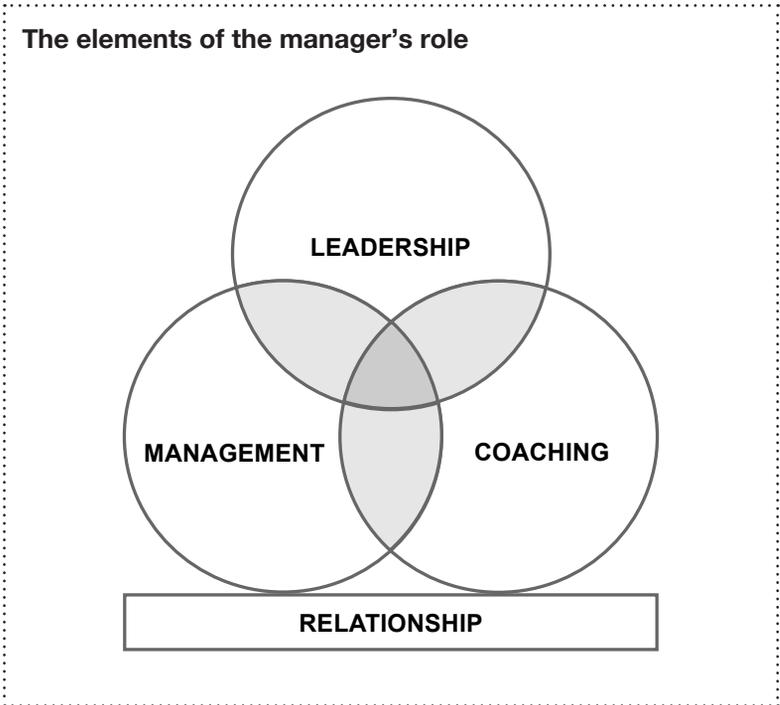
Coaching for leaders and managers

Individuals join organizations so that they can achieve some of their goals. These goals can be simple—to make enough money to pay the mort-gage—or they may be complex—to satisfy a need to make a meaningful contribution. Equally, these goals can be well thought-out and clear, or reactive and ambiguous.

An organization employs individuals to fulfil its mission and achieve its goals. Typically, the goals are, if not clear, at least explicit, so those re-sponsible seek employees who have the right skills and compatible values to fit in with those goals. Organizations are typically more diligent in identifying the right person then individuals are in identifying the right organization—or in understanding their own needs and goals.

A successful relationship between an individual and an organization is achieved when both parties achieve their own goals. This is a fundamental dynamic in any organization; if it is entirely neglected, people leave, and ultimately what that means is that there is no organization.

The individual obviously has a significant responsibility in ensuring the success of the relationship, as does the organization. The organization will give authority to a number of people to ensure that its responsibilities are met. Some of this is laid at the door of HR professionals, but by far the greatest share of an organization's responsibility rests with the manager.

It is his or her job to ensure that both parties' needs are satisfied.

There are three generic elements to the manager's role that enable this to happen: leadership, management, and coaching (see diagram).

The elements of the manager's role

LEADERSHIP

MANAGEMENT   COACHING

RELATIONSHIP

Leadership, management, and coaching

In the past 15 years, the notion that leadership is part of the manager's role has come to be accepted in most organizations. We—the world of business and management, that is—have separated out that part of the role and examined it, defined the component skills, written them into job descriptions and values statements, and created training and development programmes. Now what is emerging is that coaching is another critical element of the manager's role.

The evidence for this is to be found in the press articles, books, and conferences that have appeared in the last ten years, and in the ever-increasing

demand for programmes to develop coaching skills. And so, in a similar way to how leadership has been distinguished from management, we need to separate coaching from management and leadership.

Much has been written about leadership, and I do not want to get into that discussion here. Suffice it to say, by 'leadership' I mean the part of the role that is concerned with the future: creating a vision, maintaining that vision, and identifying actions in the present that will deliver the vision. Role modelling fits here, too: living the values, and promoting the values of the organization.

In this model, the management element of the role is concerned with ensuring that the subordinate performs their role within certain parameters. These parameters include:

- The type and nature of the organization's business (for example, an employee of a kitchenware manufacturer cannot, on a whim, start taking orders for a new line of musical instruments)
- The purpose and goals of the organization
- The requirements of the specific job
- Performance standards and management processes
- The cultural norms and any accepted rules of the company.

In some organizations, perhaps where there has been an initiative to develop a coaching culture, managers have seemingly lost the right to manage; they can only coach, which often results in a loss of appropriate control and endless conversations on issues that are not negotiable.

As I have said elsewhere, coaching is the series of conversations that help a person perform closer to his potential, understand his role or task, learn what he needs to learn in order to complete the role or task successfully, develop the skills required for the next role, and, on a good day, achieve fulfilment—and maybe a little joy—at work.

In a workshop, I might ask the participants to identify all the day-to-day activities, interactions, and conversations that take place within the three

circles of leadership, management, and coaching. Here is a typical list:

- **Leadership**
  - Conversations about organizational mission, vision, goals, values
  - Role-modelling behaviours, values
  - Inspiring and motivating.

- **Management**
  - Appraisals
  - Setting individual and departmental goals
  - Recruitment interviews
  - Creating personal development plans
  - Agreeing parameters of projects, tasks
  - Disciplinary meetings.

- **Coaching**
  - Conversations about how to deliver goals and plans
  - Giving feedback, making suggestions, offering advice
  - On-the-job training.

At a recent workshop, one of the participants, the sales director of a size-able travel-agency chain, stood up and declared: 'I see, I have one management meeting a year with each member of my team to establish the goals, and the rest of the time I coach them to achieve the goals.' He did appreciate that this was something of an over-simplification, but he had understood the point and that he needed to invest a greater proportion of his time in coaching.

The partner in charge of a major regional head office of one of the big four (it may of course be three by the time you read this) accountancies learnt something different. He signed out of a workshop with these words: 'You may not have made my life any easier, but you have certainly made it more simple.' He realized that the conversations that he had avoided with his fellow partners concerning the clarification of their business goals (and non-performance in relation to them) were critical issues to the success of the office. He knew that he had a management task to complete—defin-

ing the goals—before coaching became possible. He also understood that he could not expect the conversations to be without friction.

There is an interesting paradox here. If people do not have clear goals, it is extremely difficult to be successful, and even more difficult to discuss performance. Forcing the issue—having the discussion, and being really clear about goals and what is acceptable and what is not—removes a mass of interference and the ill feeling that often accompanies under-performance, and enables best performance.

I will further develop this model of leadership, management, and coaching later in the chapter, but before I do that I need to introduce the notion of authority as it pertains to organizations.

The relationship

The final element of the model is **relationship**. All the other elements rest on this—if there is a poor relationship, no other meaningful conversations can take place. For a real conversation to happen, there needs to be trust. This is particularly true of a coaching conversation. The player must be able to talk about himself, his role, and how he goes about it with a degree of openness in which it is possible to acknowledge not only failures and shortcomings but also strengths and desires. Many of the skills of effective coaching are essential to building a productive, trust-based relationship—listening to understand and asking questions that follow interest, to name but two.

Organizational and individual authority

There is an underlying issue here that relates to these three elements. This is the issue of authority. By authority, I mean the power to decree something, by right or office, and to get it done by oneself or others.

In order to be an effective manager, it is imperative to understand the nature of authority and where it lies. Misunderstanding this issue will affect performance in a work organization, and is critical to a manager's capacity to ensure the satisfaction of both the organization and the employee. Here are some examples.

In the past (I hope!), the culture in most organizations was very authoritarian, 'command and control' being the predominant management style. Look at the words we use: 'subordinate' and 'empowerment'. How I hate the latter word. People are by their very nature powerful. That we have to 'empower' them suggests that their power has in some way been diminished or taken away.

We have—through our culture, institutions of state and religion, and particularly our educational systems—trained people to submit to authority. And there are consequences. Under a strongly hierarchical, authoritative 'regime', people do not take responsibility, do not take risks, are not creative, and are not proactive. They wait to be told. This is not how to get the best from people—'our greatest asset'. This is misplaced authority.

On the other hand, many people do not understand that when they join an organization, they sign up to play that organization's 'game'—to play by its rules. I know this because very few people take the time in the recruitment phase to understand the organization they are joining. The closest most people get to making a real choice is to select a profession or particular industry to work in. Otherwise, the agreement around the pay package or salary is about as far as it gets.

Again, in most cases, this is perfectly understandable. You've left school, college, or university, and you have debts to pay off. Perhaps you have a family, or a mortgage. Pragmatism is the only operable philosophy. It works because the money is sufficient to make it worth staying. So you get on with it, do as you're told, and are able to pay the bills.

Clearly this is not true for everyone. But the point I am trying to make is that most people do not 'stand in their authority' and take responsibility. The consequence of this is that people experience little fulfilment at work, and are thus difficult to motivate and perform with mediocrity.

I remember giving an address to a conference. The delegates were all senior managers and executives, mostly male and heading toward middle age. These were people who were used to exercising power, with many of

them controlling budgets of millions of pounds. I asked them who made the decision about where they took their holidays that particular year. There was a short pause, and then an embarrassed laugh—no, a giggle—ran around the room. These guys exercised absolutely no authority about how they were going to spend two or three weeks of the year (weeks that they had probably fought hard for in negotiating their salary package). And most of them had travelled to places that would not have been their first choice, and done things they would not join a queue of two for. And they had not even come to a compromise on the matter—they had simply capitulated, in the name of a quiet life.

Organizations can assume too much authority, and individuals too little, although there is a spin on this. I notice that the generation that is currently entering the workforce has a completely different relationship with authority from the one that I, for one, had. They are more assertive, assume more 'rights', and are less willing to 'toe the line'. This in itself is a compelling reason to adopt something other than a 'command and control' management style, because in a world where attracting the best staff is increasingly an issue, the best will not stay in an unduly authoritarian organization.
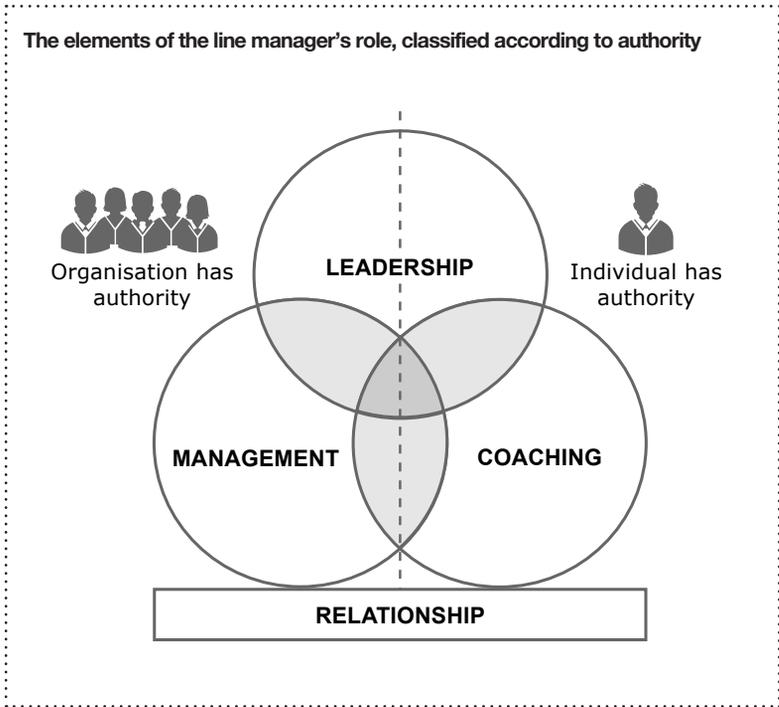
There is an appropriate balance to be struck between individual and organizational authority, and thmanager, caught in the middle, needs to understand how to strike it. Sometimes, individuals get together with other individuals and agree to share authority so that they can achieve something together that they cannot achieve apart—like a marriage. And in order that it is successful, the individual parties have to surrender some of their authority to the whole. Similarly, organizations and individuals can get together. It's a business relationship called employment.

Individuals have authority. By this, I mean that there are areas of their lives where they can make decisions and execute them without reference to others. Organizations have authority, too. They can declare the business they are in, establish goals and strategies, and execute them.

One way to understand how the matter of authority impacts on organiza-

tional life is to draw a vertical line through the middle of the three over-lapping circles shown below. You can then begin to see where this balance lies. The left-hand side of the line represents those things that are the concern of the organization: its needs, aims, and objectives. On this side of the line the organization has authority. When you join an organization, you sign up to that authority.

The area on the right-hand side of the line represents those things that are the concern of the individuals: his needs, aims, and objectives. On this side of the line, the individual has authority.

The elements of the line manager's role, classified according to authority

Organisation has authority

LEADERSHIP

Individual has authority

MANAGEMENT

COACHING

RELATIONSHIP

It is overly simplistic but nevertheless useful shorthand to suggest that *what* an individual employee does sits on the left-hand side in the authority of the organization. Clearly, this is best agreed—with the manager using coaching skills to understand the individual—rather than decreed.

How the what gets executed sits for the most part on the right-hand side of the line, in the authority of the individual employee.

Let me draw a parallel with the game of tennis. When a player stands on a tennis court, he implicitly signs up to the rules of the game as laid down by the International Tennis Federation. The player cannot change the size of the court or the height of the net, or alter the rules. He cannot, for instance, decide to kick the ball. If he does, the game ceases to be tennis. In addition to the player, there are a number of other people on the tennis court: his opponent, the umpire, the coach. The umpire and the coach are of interest in this analogy, not the opponent. The umpire's role is essentially about compliance. It is his job to ensure that the rules of the game are adhered to. In this sense, it is analogous to the management element of the of the line manager's role. The coach's role is different. His job is to ensure that the player gives his best performance and learns and improves from one match to the next. And this is obviously analogous to the coaching aspect of the line manager's role.

The very different roles of the umpire and the coach suggest a different kind of relationship with the player, and different corresponding behaviours. The umpire's relationship is invested with authority, as decreed by the governing body. It is a directive, command and-control, interactive style, and appropriately so, for if the rules were not enforced, there would be no game.

The coach's relationship with the player is altogether different. The content of the conversations between the coach and the player concerns matters that are within the authority of the player: whether he hits a backhand with one or two hands on the racket, or whether he adopts an aggressive serve-and-volley strategy or a backcourt, counter-hitting approach.
On the right-hand side of the diagram, where the individual has authority, instructing or telling that individual is less effective than listening to him and asking questions such that he comes to his own solution or insight. This is the fundamental reason why coaching is predominantly a non-directive activity.

The word 'authority' can give us an insight here. It has the same Latin root as the word 'author': a writer, someone who creates. The root is *auctum*, which means, among other things, to produce, to increase, to cause to grow, according to the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles*. An author writes his own book. A manager dictating the book to be written would soon wear the patience of the writer, turning him into a mere scribe, thus destroying his motivation and, in time, his very ability to be creative.

In the past, the failure to distinguish between managing and coaching elements of line management has caused a kind of leakage. Managers try to handle performance and learning with a management style—command and control—rather than a more facilitative style. This derives from the fact that, for most people, those they have encountered who have been charged with helping them perform or learn effectively have also had a management responsibility.

Teachers teach, but they also ensure discipline in the class, and at certain times pass judgment on their pupils' efforts—judgments that dictate the immediate future. This is true for managers, too. And for the most part, neither professional has recognized that the style appropriate to the one works less well for the other. One leaks into the other. The umpire and the coach in the tennis analogy have it easier, as the role is split between them; the manager, however, has to 'wear both hats'. There is a school of thought that proposes 'managing with a coaching style'. Many articles have been written around variations of the idea of 'The manager as coach'.

This is another form of leakage. In one company that I know of, it is almost impossible for a manager to give a direct instruction to a member of staff—they have to coach. I think this is just clumsy or incomplete thinking, and it can have the effect of undermining the manager—and, ultimately, coaching itself. It is important to separate one circle from the other.

Interestingly, when we distinguish between both sides of the vertical line, the management element takes up less time; when you place authority

where it mostly belongs—with the player—the need to manage diminishes. It does not go away, but it takes less time.

There is, it seems, a somewhat worrying corollary of this. Some years ago, I ran a workshop for the UK management team of a well-known fast-food chain with the intent of introducing them to coaching. The workshop was difficult; there was a level of polite engagement but no passion, which is unusual. It was only afterward, when I reflected back on the event, that I saw what had happened. From their perspective, you see, there is only one way to cook a burger; quality (if that is what you call it) and consistency are everything. The 'shop floor' culture—one of managing, not coaching—had engulfed the leadership team.

Clearly, if there is little or no need to coach, there should be little or no coaching; in some jobs, standardization is key to success. The problem here was that the leadership style had become very directive, resulting in a culture where risk was avoided and innovation suppressed. It is difficult for such a business to diversify.

These ideas on authority also relate to the third circle—leadership—where the line down the middle retains its validity. Sometimes, it will be appropriate for a leader to make a clear and unequivocal statement about a direction to take, or to take a difficult decision without referring to others. At other times, he may adopt a more facilitative, coaching approach to a leadership issue and elicit a decision from others.

In summary let me suggest that there are a number of issues to be borne in mind for a manager:

- Managers need to manage, and have a responsibility to both the employee and the organization to do so.
- Managers—as part of managing—need to agree clear goals for their direct reports (*what*). Interestingly, while this is clearly a management task, using coaching skills to identify the goals in the first case is always more effective.
- Managers need to hold their direct reports to account for the goals that have been agreed.

- Once the goals have been agreed, and any other parameters surrounding their role such as values and behaviours, the manager coaches the direct report to achieve the agreed goals (*how*).
- Managers need to lead, keep present in the minds of their direct reports the overarching aims of the organization, and be role models for the desired values and behaviours.