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A Strategic Tool for Introducing Coaching to Organizations

By Angela Spaxman, Business and Career Coach, Director of Spaxman Ltd., Coach Training Expert for Progress-U Ltd.

Coaching is a tool and a philosophy

Coaching is on one level simply a tool for management, leadership, sales, consulting and any activity that relies on relationships. But on another level, coaching is a philosophy, or a set of beliefs about people and success that can fundamentally change the way people in organizations work together.

When the philosophy of coaching is widely used in an organization, individuals find coaching easier and more natural. Team members expect coaching support from their leaders. Managers collaborate in learning how to be powerful coaches for their staff. An organizational culture of coaching is a learning culture: a place that recognizes effort, capitalizes on strengths, collaborates in decision-making and accepts the risks associated with learning.

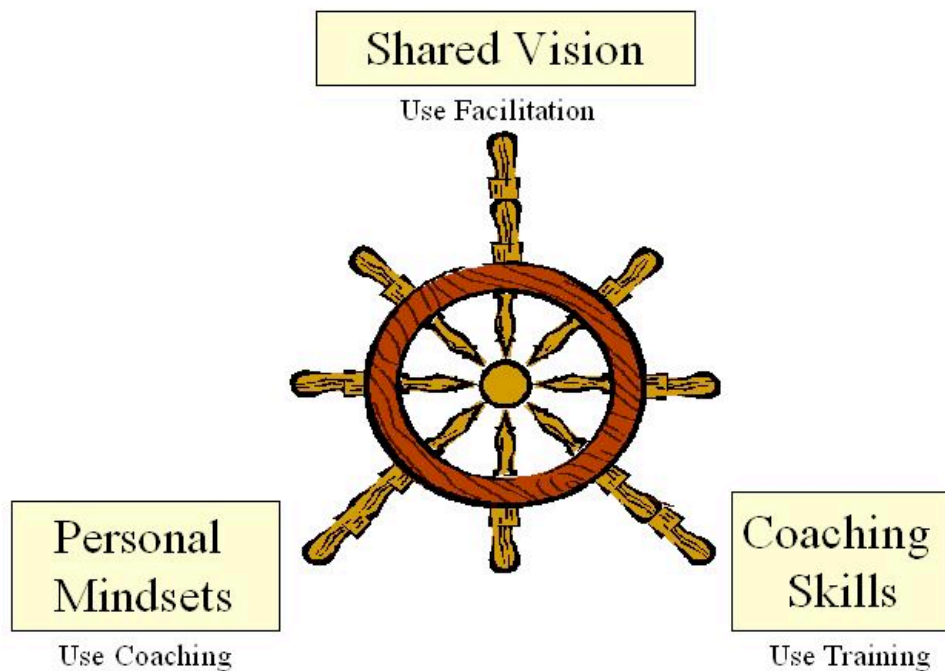
The strategic approach to introducing coaching

You can capitalize on the culture of coaching as well as the skills of coaching by introducing coaching into your organization as a strategic decision. By following a strategic approach to the development of your organization, the changes you initiate will happen more quickly, your efforts will be more efficient and the change will be sustainable. The strategy will help you keep your vision clear and sustain your efforts when the going gets tough.

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So what strategy should you choose? There are as many possible strategies for implementing cultural change as there are organizations. I use the simple model shown below to outline three main strategic choices or levers to drive organizational culture change: Shared Vision, Coaching Skills and Personal Mindsets. Each lever uses largely one type of intervention: facilitation, training and coaching.

Strategic Levers for Implementing a Coaching Culture



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A push on any lever will start the wheel turning. The levers can be used simultaneously or individually. Let me introduce each lever in turn.

Shared Vision

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The textbook way to implement any culture change is through a shared visioning process. With this lever the organization uses group facilitation methods to jointly develop a shared vision of the organization they want to be. Some organizations have already developed the ability to have conversations at a high level that can shape an empowering shared vision of their future. Many organizations can also benefit from taking this conversation down to lower levels of the organization so that the whole group understands where they are headed, why the company is choosing to change and what is in it for them. A strong shared vision that has widespread support and is kept highly visible will certainly help drive change.

Coaching Skills

To begin coaching, people need to learn how. And when people practice their newly learned skills, they also spread the culture of coaching amongst those around them. Since the skills cannot be practiced without the attitudes, the cultural norms associated with coaching tend to spread. Leaders who are practicing their coaching skills create environments around them of high trust, recognition of strengths, openness, respect, collaboration and support. Successful culture change through the practice of coaching in individual departments can lend support for culture change in other departments and at the highest levels of the company.

Personal Mindsets

Personal mindsets are the beliefs, attitudes and habits that underpin every individual's success. People with strong personal mindsets are

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self-confident, self-aware, generous and skilled at creating the lives they want as individuals. To be effective, coaches require beliefs, attitudes and habits that allow them to focus fully on the needs of their coachees. In particular, managers that coach need to be personally confident enough to let go of the limelight, let their people shine, give credit and appreciate the perspectives of others.

With the lever of personal mindsets, organizations build the capacity of their people to coach by developing their thinking and by introducing personal development tools. Since personal mindsets are developed most effectively through coaching programs, the process also serves as a model for coaching. Individuals in the organizations develop themselves, develop their capacity to support each other while experiencing a coaching process.

How to use the levers

With all three levers, the most powerful push comes when the top organizational leaders start using them. However, anyone at any level can make an impact on their part of the organization by creating a shared vision, using coaching skills or strengthening their personal mindsets.

In the past year I have been working with three organizations, for example, who are each using one of these levers as the initial primary focus of their culture development efforts.

One medium-sized organization, while expanding rapidly in China, started by developing and clarifying their vision and mission, and

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aligning efforts within the company to live their mission. Their efforts were initially executive-led and gradually are winning support throughout the hierarchy. Having created a strong vision and while continuing to communicate it, the company next trained top managers in coaching skills with the intention of trickling down the coaching culture to lower levels through the reporting structure. As the program continues, the company's sales and quality results are higher than expected and the organization is generally very positive about the changes.

Another organization took a different approach by focusing on training in management and coaching skills starting with the most junior managers in the company. Through a well-designed intensive management development process, they are influencing the whole company from the bottom-up. They chose this approach in part because they felt it was easier to influence the whole organization through the large numbers of young, lower-level managers. These young managers are keen to learn and grow, and through their numbers have a massive influence on the company in the long run.

A third organization, large and quite conservative, started their change process several years ago with a company-wide personal development program that focused on the mindset. Starting with the senior leaders and including hundreds of middle managers, they ran both individual and group coaching programs. The programs encouraged participants to set both personal and workplace goals according to their own choices. They learned personal development tools that they used to create their chosen results both at home and at work. Through this program, the company created a large bank of goodwill and a more

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empowered managerial force that adds momentum to their change process. As they continue expanding and deepening the program this year, the leaders who resisted the change are either joining the movement or moving on.

Organizational culture change takes time. Persistence is powerful. Each organization has preferences and strengths on which to capitalize in formulating strategic plans.

Some organizations do not yet have the will to change at the top levels, but I nonetheless believe that enlightened individuals can have a huge impact over time by using these culture change levers strategically within their own spheres of influence.



Angela Spaxman of Spaxman Ltd . works with business people, professionals and managers who want to be at their best and be completely themselves at work. Her clients could be accelerating their learning about management and leadership skills; inspiring, empowering and developing their team members or creating careers or businesses that suit them perfectly.

Angela has been coaching full time since 2000 and has 12 years of experience in the people-development field as a coach, corporate trainer and consultant. She is a graduate of Coach U, a Certified Practitioner of Neuro-linguistic Programming, the Founding President of the Hong Kong Coaching Community and a Lifetime Charter Member of the International Association of Coaches.

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