

## **Coaching for Results! Increasing Your Effectiveness as a Safety and Health Consultant**

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### **Introduction**

The industry of coaching has taken off in the last five to ten years, specifically in the business arena. While there have always been individuals designated as coaches in the sports world, it seems just recently that you can obtain a coach for virtually any type of personal, work or hobby activity. According to the International Federation of Coaching the current executive coaching field is currently an over-\$1 billion industry. And while safety and health professionals are not intending to become professional coaches, there is much to be learned from the field of coaching with respect to advancing the effectiveness of an organization's safety and health program.

In fact, it is the author's perspective that safety and health professionals who increase their skill and experience with respect to coaching will serve to dramatically improve and jettison an organization's ability to integrate safety within the business framework. When coming from a coaching perspective, safety professionals can significantly influence and leverage the capacity for employees at all levels in the organization to embrace and promote safety.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an introduction for safety and health professionals to the area of coaching. It is meant to define what coaching is, what is meant to be accomplished, and to offer a simple to use model for coaching. Once it is clear what coaching is and how it is accomplished, the paper will provide two coaching dysfunctions – one is when safety professionals inadvertently assume the boss role when coaching, and the second is a rescuer model. Both examples are provided in an effort to increase the results and effectiveness safety professionals can experience when they assume a coaching role within the organization.

### **Defining Coaching**

Because of the diversity of the coaching field, there are many variations on a similar theme of describing what coaching is. The two that the author has blended together to help describe coaching are from the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and from Mary Beth O'Neill, author and coach. The ICF defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential” (<http://www.coachfederation.org/find-a-coach/what-is-coaching/>). The second from Mary Beth O'Neill says, “The essence of coaching is helping leaders to get unstuck from their dilemmas and assisting them in transferring their learning into results for the organization” (2000, p. xiii). Both

these definitions bring some key terms to the forefront to help understand what coaching is, along with its role in working with others.

The first key term is partnering. Coaching is all about the relationship, and specifically focused on a partnering process. It is the building of, supporting, and nurturing a relationship between two individuals – namely the coach and the person being coached. Partnering in this sense focuses on the inter-relationship of two people, such that there is a trust and caring concern each for the other. Without this trust and concern at the heart of the relationship, coaching in its most powerful sense does not exist. One of the questions that arises about coaching is whether as part of the relationship there needs to be mutual respect? Absolutely, respect is a key aspect of coaching. Respect both for the person being coached, as well as towards the coach. Respect towards the person being coached is the understanding that as a human being they have capabilities, capacities, and potential that, while it may not be immediately evident, is existent and waiting to emerge. For the coach, there needs to be respect for the knowledge, insight, and wisdom they bring into the relationship. A final aspect of the partnering relationship is the active commitment and participation from both the coach and person being coached towards improvement. If either believes that the other is not fully participating, then the coaching relationship breaks down.

The second key term that defines coaching is getting unstuck. Coaching is all about working with people towards a forward momentum of navigating areas in their life, whether it be personal, work, career, etc. Coaching, unlike therapy or counseling, is not focused on looking back in history as to why people do or don't do things, it is understanding where they are in the current moment and what it will take for them to move beyond the stuck area that they find themselves in. Getting unstuck recognizes the enormous capacity and potential that people have in learning, growing, and changing based on understanding what is causing their discomfort or challenging them. Analogous to getting unstuck is the idea of repositioning, reframing, and even tapping into different muscles of activity to learn and grow.

The other aspect of getting unstuck is that people recognize and acknowledge they are stuck in the first place. If there is no initial belief that one is stuck, then the ability to work with someone to get unstuck is not often possible. There has to be some personal acceptance that there is an aspect of being stuck that is challenging or preventing someone from being moving forward in whatever capacity needed. Without this acceptance, then the relationship moves out of the realm of coaching.

The final term is results. Coaching is all about producing results for an individual. If results are not evident, then the coaching was ineffective. A critical component to coaching is identifying upfront, in partnership, what are the results or goals to be achieved by the coaching process. Whether it is an in-the-moment goal or one that is longer term, measurable outcomes and achieving those outcomes are important. Part of the coaching experience is to help the person being coached recognize the results occurring, realizing that sometimes they are even aware of their existence.

In summarizing, coaching is a partnering process, that helps individuals to get unstuck from whatever their current situation or dilemma in a way that offers them measurable outcomes and results. Relying on this definition, the field of coaching has expanded into multiple areas for consideration, all focused around the multiple dimensions of an individual's life. Some key

coaching areas include: business or work coaching, life or personal coaching, career coaching, and blended coaching.

Business or work coaching focuses on the situation or dilemma that is apparent in a work setting, looking at such factors as developing strategies, meeting business goals and objectives, getting along with others in a work setting, decision-making, and other aspects tied to business. Life or personal coaching focuses on the whole individual within their life perspective, how they are living their personal life to the fullest, personal goals, and interpersonal relationship with family and friends. An outgrowth of life coaching is the area of career coaching, working with people to re-evaluate the work they do, what drives their passion, and how to set goals and strategies to expand the work they do.

Blended coaching merges the concept of working with individual within a business setting of an organization, keeping in the mind the greater systems view or approach to the organizational learning. It is recognizing that when the capacity and commitment of key individuals are expanded, then the whole organization benefits. With blended coaching there may not only be individual coaching involved, but also work with a group or team in which the individual is involved. In this way both the person gets unstuck from the dilemma and the team or system within which the person operates is also supported.

## **Coaching Framework**

Coaching occurs in conversations with others. It is the discourse between two people that enables a person to identify and interrupt their old patterns of behaviors. Once the identification is made, the opportunities for determining new actions of change open the horizons of possibilities. The extent to make these conversations as powerful and as self-reflective for the person being coached involves a balance between three distinct phases: inquiry, advocacy, and self-reflection. All three of these concepts work together to enhance and augment the coaching conversation.

Inquiry is about asking questions of a person to elicit what they are thinking, feeling, and what is motivating the actions they are taking. When asking questions from an inquiry perspective it is important to come from a mindset of curiosity, genuine interest, and open to truly understanding why a person is doing what they are doing. This type of understanding does not pass critical judgment, blame, shame, or even imposition on the person being asked the questions. Alternately, understanding does not mean that one agrees with or supports the current action of the person. Rather that a deeper level of what is causing the action from a mindset perspective becomes known. Some examples of inquiry questions or comments can include:

- Tell me more . . .
- What do you mean by . . .
- Please clarify
- So what I hear you saying is . . . Did I leave anything out?
- What are some examples of your concern?
- What was behind your thinking?
- What were some of your assumptions?
- What's your primary concern?
- Of all the things you mentioned, name where it would be most helpful to focus your attention?

While inquiry creates the foundation for understanding what motivates and what are the reasons behind a person's actions and behavior, advocacy selects a position or course of reason to assist the person in examining their mindset. Advocacy does not mean iterating everything a person should do differently or change to get them unstuck. Advocacy seeks to identify one specific action or behavior that can help them to examine their actions from a different perspective. Advocacy seeks to define a stepping stone upon which a person can build their capacity for change to get unstuck from their dilemma or challenge. Some of the key aspects of advocacy include:

- Developing a stance or direction that supports the person's needs, requirements, and motivational needs to change.
- Provides a clear and compelling rationale for the stance or direction being proposed.
- Describes clarification and underlying reasoning for the stand or direction being proposed.

Those who are new to coaching will often provide a litany of positions that they advocate to another. However, for the coaching to be powerful and sustainable, the coach need only provide one or two key changes in actions and behavior to help a person get unstuck. Presenting more than one or two key changes can create a feeling of being overwhelmed and unable to take action.

Along with advocacy and inquiry, self-reflection is another key aspect of coaching. Self-reflection applies both to the coach, as well as to the person being coached. Self-reflection is defined as the opportunity to slow down one's thinking to become more aware of how and why one's mental models are being formed. Self-reflection not only examines one's actions, but seems them in context to the greater picture of life patterns and circumstances. The opportunity for self-reflection comes in the stillness and quiet of personal moments. In our speed-up society, perhaps some of the greatest opportunity we have to examine our actions is to slow down, be reflective, which then actually enables us to speed-up with respect to change and new awareness.

Drawing the concepts of inquiry, advocacy, and reflection together then enables a coaching model to be unfolded for use by safety and health professionals. The ITM Coaching Model or in-the-moment was developed by Dr. Susan Bethanis of Mariposa Leadership, Inc. The three pieces of the model consist of:

- Rapport building
- Assessing the Situation
- Re-framing to help others solve the problem.

The first piece of the coaching model is all about working on actions to develop and build the relationship between the coach and person being coached. Rapport building focuses on removing distractions between the two people and building a connection using body language, voice tone, and tempo. To build a connection requires matching the person being coached, being fully present for them, and focusing solely on how to build trust and rapport. Some examples of body language, voice qualities and word selection are included in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

Body Language	Voice Qualities	Words
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sitting posture – turned towards the other person in a way that matches their sitting posture.</li><li>• Hand gestures – where are the hands positioned? How does the stance match with the other person's?</li><li>• Facial expressions – is there a calmness, agitation, or quickness of pace being reflected in the face?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inflection – in what ways are words being punctuated or used to show emotion in the information being shared?</li><li>• Volume – is the speaker speaking loudly, softly, agitatedly or emotionally?</li><li>• Tempo or pace – is the person talking quickly or slowly, using long pauses for reflection?</li></ul>	Match the words that the person being coached is using to demonstrate active listening and intention to understand what they are saying.

Assessing the situation, within the coaching model, seeks to clarify the situation. The use of inquiry is foremost when attempting to determine what is challenging or creating barriers for the person being coached. When a coach is assessing, they are attempting to understand the person's position both from their perspective, as well as from the other person's perspective. Though it can seem so evident to the coach, part of the assessment helps the other person to clearly identify and define what is challenging them. During the assessment, often a person comes with one problem, which in reality may only be the symptom of a much deeper challenge. Creating a safe and secure space for the person to share their perspective, as well as being asked questions that dig deeper into the feelings they are experiencing, is often very freeing. People being coached have commented that during this time they felt heard, and it was almost akin to a healing opportunity.

Part of the assessment is to set the problem, both for the coach and the person being coached. Setting the problem involves being able to clearly define the problem and being certain that if that challenge could be resolved, then opportunities for moving forward would be possible. As part of setting the problem, an examination of past patterns or possible limitations that the person is imposing upon or within themselves may become known.

The final step in the coaching model is to re-frame the presenting problem for the person being coached. A frame is one person's perspective of how they are looking at the problem or challenge. The frame is neither right nor wrong, just the one the person is using. Often when the frame or perspective is shifted, then clarity for how to address the challenge becomes evident. Metaphorically speaking a frame is akin to what is seen through the lens of the camera. If you shift the camera lens, such as widen or narrow the focus, the entire scene is shifted. It is the same with helping a person to re-frame their perspective.

Opportunities for re-framing come in a variety of ways. Some can be attuned to the language a person uses. For example, let's say they are upset about everyone within the company. When asked about who everyone represents, it may become apparent that the real concern is with a particular colleague or individual within a work team. Perhaps that person is over-zealous in

their attitudes towards safety, and the repercussions are creating others to not be observant about safety. By helping to re-frame who everyone is, there becomes the opportunity to determine how action might be taken for the person to use their voice to correct the situation. Table 2 provides some examples of limiting words and recommendations for re-framing that can be used.

**Table 2.**

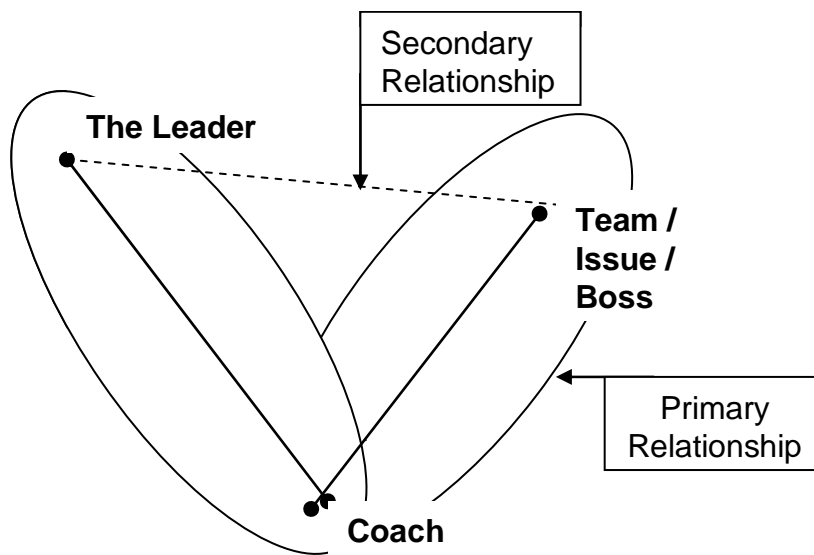
<b>Limiting Words</b>	<b>Re-Framing</b>
Universal words – all every, never	What does all represent? When does every . . . occur? How often does never happen?
Should, shouldn't, must, can't	What would happen if you did . . .? What causes or prevents you from . . .?
Generalizations	Who is "they"? or Who is "everyone"?
Too much, too many, too expensive	Compared to what?

## **Dysfunctional Coaching Roles for Safety Professionals**

There are a myriad of ways for safety professionals to serve in coaching roles, supporting both front-line employees doing the work and those in supervisory positions responsible for holding people accountable to safety expectations. However, there are several roles that safety professionals get drawn into because of their area of expertise, which does not support the organization's efforts towards improved safety performance.

The first one is when safety professionals switch from being a coach to serving in the boss role and holding individuals accountable to safety expectations. When the safety professional does this they move from being a supporter of the safety process to being seen as a cop or enforcer. According to Mary Beth O'Neill (2000, 190), "a boss is the one who holds people accountable for results. A coach helps people increase their skills to achieve the results." She goes on to iterate that a combination of a boss and coach is someone "who both mandates the goal and helps people develop the ability to accomplish it" (2000, 190). From the author's perspective, safety professionals serve in the role of a coach. It should be the organization that is responsible for setting the goals around safety, and up to every supervisor to enforce those goals. It is the role of safety professionals to coach and support those throughout the organization that either lack the skills or need support in increasing their skill capacity related to achieving the safety goals of the company. Safety professionals serve only in the roles of a boss or combination boss and coach when they have people reporting to them directly. The safety professional's job is help teach those within the organization the skills to practice and promote safety, each from their own vantage point within the overall organization.

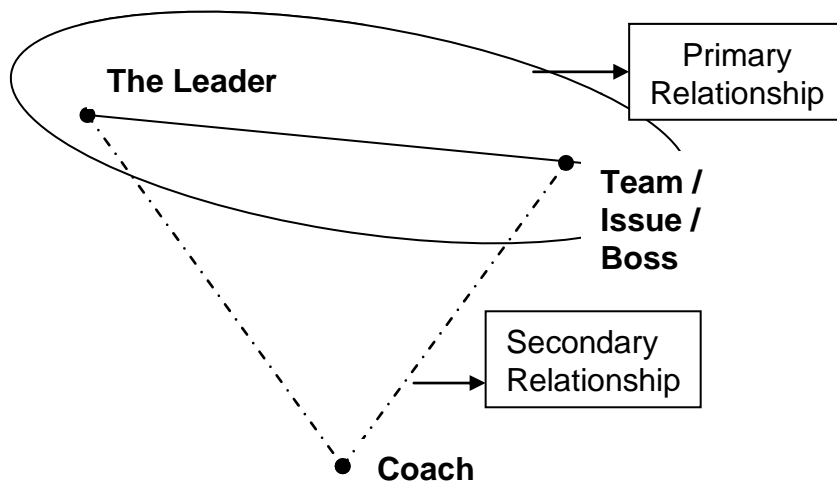
Another role dysfunction for safety professionals is when they switch from being a consultant for safety and become the rescuer for safety. Mary Bath O'Neill (2000) addresses this dysfunction by comparing two models, a rescuer model and responsibility model. The Rescue Model is shown below in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Rescue Model of Coaching.**

In this model the coach (a.k.a. safety professional) is drawn into the middle between the leader and the team or individual issues. An example that illustrates this model is an employee who is not following safety procedures. The supervisor asks the safety professional to talk with the employee about the infractions and help them understand why safety is important. If the safety professional agrees, they enter into a primary relationship both with the supervisor and with the employee. And while resolution may be reached, the employee changes their practice, the safety professional has created a rescue relationship. They did not coach the supervisor to deal with this situation or have them take personal responsibility as a supervisor to coach the employee to change their safety behaviors. Too often when this type of scenario occurs, safety people are called back again and again to provide support. Perhaps if they had recognized the role dysfunction, they might have been able to change the situation upfront.

Part of shifting the dynamics requires the understanding of a different relationship the safety professional can serve while being a coach. Mary Beth O'Neill (2000 68) describes this as the client responsibility model. An illustrated example of the Client Responsibility Model of Coaching is shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Client Responsibility Model of Coaching.**

In this second model the coach (a.k.a. Safety Professional) supports both the leader and the team or individual, but they do not become part of the primary relationship. Using our example above, the Safety Professional would decline to speak directly with the employee. However, they might offer to support the leader by coaching them in how to communicate with the employee about following safe practices. They might even be willing to sit in the conversation between the supervisor and employee, observing how the leader does and assisting both the leader and employee in coming to a resolution. In this way the same objective gets accomplished, the employee recognizes the safe behavior they should be practicing. Yet the leader also learns how to coach others around safety for the future and maintains their primary relationship as boss to the employee. If brought in as a third-party observer, the Safety Professional needs to ensure they do not advocate one position or another. Rather to assist the leader and coach to come to an agreement about correct actions for safety moving forward.

## Conclusion

There is a lot of responsibility on safety and health professionals to move beyond the cop or enforcer role within their organizations with respect to improving safety. For individuals to model the behavior they want, a coaching model can be used to support others as part of the safety and health system. Making use of a coaching model increases the capacity and abilities of others to participate fully as part of the safety process. For safety professionals, they are able to see the work they do in light of different opportunities to influence and support those within their organizations.

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