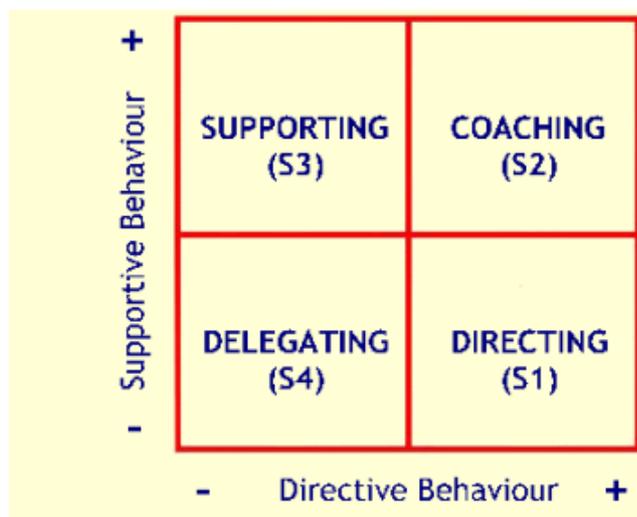


Additional materials: Coaching

Coaching has been identified as one of the nine essential skills for organisational leaders. So, what is coaching? When is it appropriate? And what differentiates coaching from other strategies of leading people and teams?

Coaching assumed a level of importance in 1969 when Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard introduced a management model entitled 'situational leadership'. Their model, represented in Figure 1, maintained that people are generally operated in one of four situational contexts. The key to effective management, therefore, was effectively identify the context in which an individual was working, and to lead the person accordingly.



Blanchard and Hersey's second quadrant was entitled 'Coaching.' They believed that many people in the second situational quadrant (S2.) were operating with *some competence* but *low commitment*. These individuals did not respond well to a directive management style, but they had not yet attained a level of competence and commitment that was required to apply a 'supporting' and 'delegating' approach. The best approach, therefore, was coaching.

People constantly and consistently shift between quadrants of the situational leadership matrix.

So, what does a coach do? In his book *Effective Coaching*, Marshall Cook (1999) challenges readers to reflect on when they were first learning to ride a bike. As a parent, your role is to serve as a coach, 'running beside the wobbling bike, shouting encouragement, your fist tightly clutching the handlebars and then gradually loosening your grip until finally, your heart in your throat, you let go, launching your child into the world.' (p. 6)

The bicycle metaphor provides many useful insights into the role of a coach. Most importantly, we must continually recognise that coaching process is a relationship. It is only through working together that the coach and the individual (or team) can take an activity that at first seemed

impossible, and make it become second nature. In this relationship, the coach provides the environment, support, feedback and encouragement while the individual or team must be open and committed to change and improvement.

To illustrate the attributes of a good coach, Marshall Cook (1999) developed a useful tool that compares and contrasts the traits of the archetypal 'boss' with the ideal 'coach.' (p.27)

The boss	The coach
Talks a lot Tells Fixes Presumes Seeks control Orders Works on Puts product first Wants reasons Assigns blame Keeps distant	Listens a lot Asks Prevents Explores Seeks commitment Challenges Works with Puts process first Seeks results Takes responsibility Makes contact

Below are two themes that are central to the work of a coach.

1. Focus on communication

As in all successful relationships, coaching requires a commitment to good communication. A good coaching session should have a clear purpose, have established ground rules, keep focused, be based on clear and simple communication, and depend on an openness to new ideas.

2. Invest in problem identification

The first step in getting somewhere is knowing where you want to go. Effective problem diagnosis is critical to improving performance. In a coaching relationship, problem diagnosis should be carried out jointly. Particularly important to effective diagnosis are listening skills. Coaches must avoid the temptation of immediately rushing in and naming what they see as the problem. Coaches should avoid the temptation of leading the conversation, and instead practise 'active listening', a process through which the coach attempts to reflect the thoughts and views back to the person being coached to ensure that he/she is being correctly understood. A second skill set of particular importance to effective coaches is the ability to develop good questions.

References

Cook, M. (1999). *Effective Coaching*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

The Ken Blanchard Companies. (2004). *Situational Leadership II*. Retrieved February 18, 2004 from <http://www.kenblanchard.com/areas/situationalll.cfm>