



Clutterbuck
Associates

COACHING THE TEAM AT WORK

Prof. David Clutterbuck

Although there has been a lot of research and writing about coaching teams in sport, there is very little useful guidance about coaching teams at work and even less that is grounded on any form of structured observation or evidence. Two years ago, my team and I started to pull together all the available research and case studies we could find around the world and to interview a wide range of people engaged in some form or other of team coaching.

Our studies – to be published as a book in 2007ⁱ – confirmed that there are only a handful of relevant and useful academic studies of coaching at work. They also confirmed that:

- Very few line managers ever move beyond coaching individuals to coaching the team as a whole
- Many, perhaps most, external “team coaches” are in fact providing team facilitation – there seems to be a widespread inability to distinguish between what are two substantially different roles.
- There are at least four types of team coach. The leader-as-coach works within the team and his or her work is integrated with theirs. (A sports analogy would be the captain on the field.) The manager-as-coach is on the touch-line – observing but not participating in the activities.

The sports analogy is one that needs to be treated with great care, however. Sports teams and work teams have very different structures, dynamics and purposes – for example, sports teams are focused on winning, but work teams may achieve more by collaborating with rivals. Moreover, sports teams are not all the same – the degree of interdependence and cooperation required in a rugby team is much greater than that in, say a Ryder Cup golf team. Choosing the wrong sports analogy to apply to a work team can be disastrous, according to US studies.

It seems that effective team coaches need to add a number of skills to an existing portfolio of one-to-one coaching competences. In particular, they need:

- A deep understanding of team dynamics, based on both practical (hands-on) experience and a wide reading of research
- A recognition of the different types of team in organisations and how differences in membership and task affect behaviour, task achievement and learning processes
- A comprehensive awareness of the difference in relationship dynamics and interpersonal behaviours between coaching individuals and coaching groups (and between team coaching and team facilitation)
- An understanding of when the time is and is not propitious to coach the team. For example, it appears from research that project teams are much more open and responsive to coaching at some times than at others.

Our study also identifies a range of issues that team coaches need to be aware of and, if those issues arise, to have appropriate (flexible, robust and insight-provoking) approaches to address. They tend to fall into three categories:

- Managing interpersonal dynamics is about helping the team develop the internal capability to surface and deal with conflict, to build the collective emotional intelligence and the collective self-belief, to manage stress and to establish and maintain a healthy coaching climate.
- Temporal issues relate to decisions about when and how the coach should intervene; to the nature of the team's temporal orientation (how it thinks about past, present and future and the appropriate of this orientation to the team's task); and to time management.
- Managing key processes relates to goal setting, understanding how the team functions and building its capacity in terms of creativity, systems thinking, and communication. It also covers evaluating the impact of coaching

Having a wide enough portfolio of approaches and frameworks to help the team tackle these often complex issues – and particularly to be honest towards themselves as each other – is a challenge for even the most experienced team coach. Even more challenging is the process of helping the team make the transition to coaching itself.

*If you would like to receive David's latest articles by email,
please let us know at info@clutterbuckassociates.co.uk*

Clutterbuck Associates

Grenville Court
Britwell Road
Burnham
Bucks, SL1 8DF
UK

T: +44 (0) 1628 661667

F: +44 (0) 1628 661779

E: info@clutterbuckassociates.co.uk

www.clutterbuckassociates.co.uk

ⁱ Clutterbuck, D (2007) *Coaching the Team at Work* N. Brealey, London and Boston