

# LEVERAGE™

NEWS AND IDEAS FOR THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNER

PEGASUS

## Coaching as a Learning Tool

By KRISTIN COBBLE AND  
ED GUROWITZ

Over the past several years, coaching has emerged as a powerful new model for leadership and management. Because coaching is a time- and cost-effective way to support the learning process, it also can be an ideal tool for managers wishing to build a participative learning culture. This article describes four different models of coaching and illustrates how each facilitates organizational learning.

### Four Models of Coaching

Writers such as Timothy Gallwey and John Whitmore define coaching as helping others unlock their potential and improve performance.

Coaching differs from traditional management approaches in that it focuses less on telling employees how to complete a task and more on asking them good questions to lead them to discover their own answers. Coaching contrasts with conventional leadership methods in that it centers more on the follower than on the leader. In effect, it turns traditional models of leadership and management upside down.

Several types of coaching are effective in business settings: however, some are more useful than others in promoting organizational learning.

### Expert Coaching

As expert coach focuses on delivering knowledge and information accurately and articulately. Classroom training centered on a dynamic presentation or lecture is an example of expert coaching. Though expert coaching represents a quick way to introduce beginners to content-rich subjects, it does not create deep learning.

A leader can use expert coaching to impart a large amount of information to employees at an intellectual level, but this technique does not give learners an opportunity to explore the subject in depth. They may walk away thinking they “get it,” when in actuality they have only a surface-level understanding of the topic. The danger is that they may not be motivated to develop further mastery of the subject, and therefore may not change their behavior and performance.

### Facilitator Coaching

Facilitator coaching involves helping teams and individuals manage processes—such as meetings—more effectively. An outside consultant helping a team manage the process of developing a vision might serve as a facilitator coach. Using this approach, a coach can also help groups learn to question their mental models and to develop team learning capacity. If coaches have predetermined outcomes they want coachees to reach, however, the coachees may feel manipulated.

### Mentor Coaching

Mentor coaching is highly valued in today’s business environment. A mentor trains, develops, and promotes a learner who, in return, works on the mentor’s projects. The mentee learns and grows,

gaining valuable experience, while the mentor’s projects move ahead. However, mentor coaching often reaches a limit when the coachee develops to the level where she is ready and eager to pursue her own commitments. At that point, the relationship may end, with a loss of the junior employee’s contribution to the project and of the mentor’s ongoing guidance.

### Generative Coaching

Generative coaching fosters a relatively rare and special relationship between coach and coachee. It requires a coach to act as a “steward” in service of the coachee’s goals, completely independent of the coach’s immediate interests and projects. For example, a generative coach would encourage a coachee to grow and pursue his own vision rather than let him remain in a company that is a poor fit. Generative coaching focuses on developing the employee’s creative abilities; its strength lies in giving individuals the tools to initiate and implement organizational agendas that are not mere extensions of the status quo. This approach also provides a powerful model for developing an individual’s or team’s vision; however, its effectiveness diminishes when someone has the “right” answer to the problem or issue.

Expert and facilitative coaching can be low-cost, time-effective methods of promoting organizational learning. However, for long-term change, mentor and generative coaching provide more effective tools for creating an organizational culture in which learning forms the basis for work and relationships.

*Kristin Cobble is an independent consultant who partners with Generative Leadership Group, Innovation Associates, and The Learning Circle. Edward M. Gurowitz, Ph.D. is a founder and director of Generative Leadership Group, LLC, a leadership training and management consulting practice.*

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