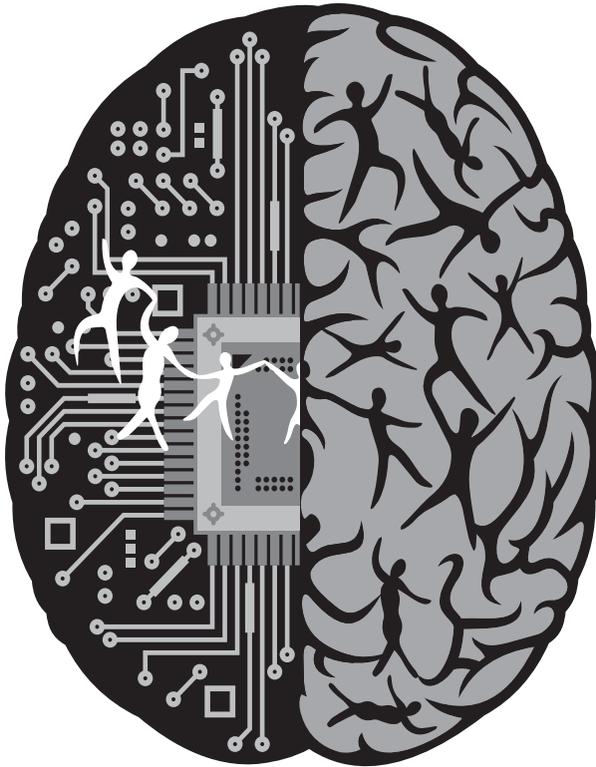


AND THE LEADER IS...



**Transforming Cultures
with CEQ**

GARETH CHICK

Section 1
Coaching

Chapter 1

Clumsy coaching

Why ‘clumsy’?

With an awareness of OUCH! – our unconscious controlling habits – we’ve realised that we have become so skilled with these that they have come to feel ‘natural’. Breaking these habits means putting something else in their place. We cannot simply stop doing one thing, we need to *start* doing another. Since controlling feels so natural, coaching will feel decidedly unnatural and so we have to be prepared to be clumsy as we start coaching. The good news is that clumsy reinforces vulnerability and our humanity and trustworthiness.

Leadership theory tells us that there are many leadership styles and methods, however I like to talk about just two opposite styles – directing and coaching. I consider teaching to be a separate process; one that is hugely necessary and beneficial, but separate to, and in support of either of the two prime styles.

Directing people means telling them precisely what to do (and probably how to do it), how to report to you, and maybe what they will get when they are successful. This style is all about control. Things will be done my way, and then all will be well and everything will go to plan.

I am not saying that this style is wrong – it’s not. In certain circumstances this style is not only correct, but essential. Giving clear direction and telling people precisely what to do can make people feel very safe and feel highly motivated to carry out instructions. I recall an incident that really brought this home to me. I went out on a day’s sailing with a client, having never sailed before. I was nervous because I simply did not know how to do things. The ropes were a mystery to me and the sail positioning to the wind was counterintuitive. So my client had to be very precise in his instructions to me – and the more precise he was, the more confident I felt. He was reluctant to give me orders and wanted to give me an opportunity to discover things for myself – until a crisis point when the wind suddenly changed when we were slicing through the water at eight knots. I missed my cue and in an instant I experienced all the emotions of failure – I was letting my colleagues down and I did not know what to do and started to panic. Luckily my client went into extreme direction mode and screamed a very precise instruction in my ear. He was not polite. His voice contained urgency, and frustration with me. He swore. And it was exactly what I needed. In that instant I felt relieved and safe. I pulled the correct rope through and tied it off, and the crisis was averted. He gave me the leadership that I needed right at that moment.

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If directing is all about control, coaching is all about growth. Directing is giving people our solutions. Coaching is the opposite – not giving solutions but getting the other person to perform to their best; finding methods and processes and structures



that enable others to come to their own solutions and choose their own actions. And just where are they supposed to get this coaching from if not from us as their line manager – their ‘performance’ manager?

So knowing it’s OK for us to be directive at times, and knowing we’re going to be a bit clumsy as we start to coach, we can at least make the change. What people want more than anything else is clarity. They just need to know what’s expected of them. Our problem is that, knowing that there are just the two styles of leadership, instead of being clear about which style we are using, we try and mix the two and find a continual middle ground of a style. This is not helpful to people, in fact it is highly confusing. People want to be coached most of the time, and then are prepared to be directed as an exception. Trust and respect grow when people know that we are genuinely attempting to coach them, even if we are clumsy sometimes, and this buys us the right to direct them clearly and strongly when it is necessary and appropriate.

We need to consciously choose the style we are going to employ, moment by moment. We cannot delegate by abdication, even when it sounds incredibly supportive, even possibly enlightened. For when people are left alone, they will come to decide for themselves that their objective is not achievable and they will start constructing their perfect reasons for when they are held to account for ‘failing’.

Poor forecasting is endemic in organisations and it has this moment of decision at its root, for people don’t choose to tell us when they have decided that the target is not possible. Their exhortations that the target is still possible may sound highly committed, but in reality they have started the positioning of the excuses.

If only all the energy that was put into selling our excuses was put into achieving the stated objectives, business performance would be revolutionised. And this is where the adoption of a cultural change to having coaching as the predominant leadership style is utterly transformational in organisational success, since suddenly the truth is exposed and ruthless honesty comes to the fore in a collegiate spirit of simply wishing to achieve more and grow, and for everyone to be fulfilled in the process.

The five myths of coaching

The biggest problem any of us have in achieving excellence in coaching is that we tend to believe the myths that surround the term itself. ‘Coaching’ is a term much used in the world of ‘modern’ leadership; however, when asked to define it we struggle. What would your definition be?

So what are the myths that we are guilty of being seduced by?

First of all we believe that coaching is ‘soft and fluffy’ – that coaching is not being tough on people or driving better performance out of them, but that it is being more gentle and understanding, and needs an immense amount of patience to allow people to come to their own decisions and processes. This then leads us to the second myth – that it takes longer to coach people than to simply direct them, and it is this belief that stops us from investing in the skill development needed. It is the same barrier that stops us from delegating to people, since it is often quicker to do it ourselves than to explain to someone else.



Myth 3 is that teaching people is coaching them. In other words when we are explaining a process or a guideline or a company rule to people, we tell ourselves that we are coaching them and we often confuse the two.

But the most restricting beliefs are Myths 4 and 5 – Myth 4 is that we genuinely tell ourselves that we know how to coach, and Myth 5 is that we are already coaching our people. I often hear in my workshops *I already coach my people*, when in fact we need to realise that when we believe we are coaching, we are usually being more inclusive and consensual, and perhaps even more polite, but we are not coaching, we are simply directing people more subtly. We may even be guilty of manipulation.

And notice that when we say that we ‘need’ to be better at something, that sentence usually ends in an unspoken ‘but’: *Of course I need to be better at coaching and I need to coach my people more than I do, but... I just don’t get the time to spend with each of them/ I do my best/I am better than I was ten years ago.* Silent ‘buts’ basically mean that we have no intention of changing – listen out for them. The phrase ‘I need to...’ rarely leads to urgent action or embedded change.

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Human potential

What percentage of your personal potential are you currently delivering in your work?

Made you think, didn’t it? It’s a question that raises so many different issues for us: What is our potential? Do I really want to give 100 per cent at work, or do I want to save some for home? Can anyone ever get to 100 per cent of their potential? My brain hurts just thinking about it, so can’t I just be happy as I am?

After we’ve all thrashed around a bit, I guess what we can all agree on is how ever much of our potential we are delivering, there is more to come. We all have a sense that we could be achieving more, giving more of ourselves and all the passion, enthusiasm and sheer depth of capability that we possess. We might be working as hard as we can, but we could probably all be working smarter. So what is stopping us?

Listing the external factors that are holding us back is the easy answer to the question of what is stopping us delivering more of ourselves into our work, especially when we are under pressure. And these factors are of course very real on a day-to-day basis. However, when we get ourselves into a fixed belief that only when certain things happen outside of us will we be able to fulfil our potential, we have entered a dangerous zone.

When we step back and breathe and analyse things, we realise of course that the key to delivering more of our potential lies squarely within ourselves. We must change ourselves, and that takes two things: courage and having a great coach!

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At the very least, how often could they work it out or find the answer for themselves? Although we might struggle to put a number on the first question, when we think about it we do know that it is a pretty high proportion of the time. With the second part of the question, the answer might even be pretty close to 100%. We know this, and yet it is a constant source of frustration to us. How much more efficient our businesses would be if only people did the job we paid them to do, and if they only ‘got’ the fact that part of what we pay them to do is think for themselves and solve problems, or do we have to end up doing everything ourselves; thinking of everything; worrying about *everything*?

The critical question of course is not how often people come and ask, but *why* they come and ask if they really know the answer or could easily work it out for themselves? Yes, you’ve guessed it – maybe it’s more to do with us than it is to do with them. Blaming them is easy and often quite enjoyable, but the answer is to look at the way we manage them. If we genuinely want our people using their initiative, thinking for themselves and solving their own problems then we need to change the way we manage them – we need to become genuine coaches.

The reality is that people come and ask because we reward that behaviour. It’s a habit they’ve learned. Maybe they are seeking reassurance, or maybe they’re fearful of getting it wrong, but why would that be the case? Unless, of course, their experience of us is that we can be predatory at times. Us? Surely not...

The reality is that our habits have created their habits. If we want them to develop new habits, we *have* to start with ourselves.

And remember the key word in the question above is ‘problem’ – we are not talking about technical facts or processes that people need to be taught. If it’s their first day in the business and they come and ask where the bathroom is, there is very little point in saying *Where do you think the bathroom is?* Teach them what they don’t know. Now if they come and ask on day two, they’re just being lazy and using us as a crutch... so coach away!

If coaching is about growth, and if taking the risks is going to be worth it, just what could this ‘untapped potential’ in people look like? And if we are going to release it, how do we know that it will come out in an orderly and appropriate (controllable) fashion?

The question regarding the percentage of personal potential people are currently delivering in their work is one I have asked hundreds of times to individuals and groups of managers. And in any group the average answer invariably comes out to about 65 per cent. The range of course is often huge – from 20 per cent to 100 per cent, and we all interpret the question slightly differently, yet it’s as if we all instinctively know that there is ‘more to come’.

Now if I asked the question in terms of effort or work rate or hours worked, I know I would get answers of 100 per cent and maybe more! Because we all know that we can't work much harder or put many more hours in. Recent advances in technology have pushed management 'productivity' to new levels. We can all now work more hours per day on more things, and the latest daily 'holy grail' for managers is an empty inbox. What insanity!

The other thing we instinctively sense about our potential, is that we don't need to tap into much more to give a step change – the sense that another 5 per cent could transform our confidence, our skills, our performance, our achievements.

When we are fearful of judgement, we stop ourselves from trying something different. It's as if we have to be guaranteed of success before we'll even try something. Thank God that business success is not dependent upon managers learning to ride bikes. Remember what it took for you to learn to ride a bike – basically you had to make a fool of yourself by falling off hundreds of times and by having to have a parent or carer run along behind you grabbing at your saddle and shouting inane encouragements at you. But, of course, you were not conscious of this, or if you were, the desire to ride was greater than your desire to look 'cool'.

I remember going surfing with my son Tom when he was 15, when neither of us could surf. He learned much quicker than me, due simply to the fact that he had more goes than I did in the same amount of time we were out together. My strategy was to wait for a really good wave that would give me a chance of a decent attempt – he just tried every wave that came along. I spent most of my time standing up in the water waiting for a 'great' wave. He spent most of his time falling off. I had about ten attempts. He probably had 100. He wanted to learn to surf. I wanted not to look stupid.

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We say that people are our biggest asset, and then we don't invest the highest standards of leadership in them. So how do we bring out that extra 5 per cent of people's potential? Great question, and having the awareness to ask it of ourselves means that we are halfway there! As a coach, my job is to help people perform at their peak, as much of the time as possible, and certainly more often than they would if I was not around. In doing so, I help them extend their peak beyond what they believed it to be and beyond any level they've yet achieved.

Nine times out of ten, when people come and ask us as their manager what they should do, they know the answer. They certainly know where to look for the answer, even if the solution is not obvious. How inefficient is that? Now I hear you saying that *your* people don't just come and ask you. No they probably don't – they are far too subtle for that, nevertheless they do know how to put you in a position where you will give them the answer.

So the real question is, why do they come and ask? We need to realise just how important it is for any employee to please their boss – yes, even you. So when they

are about to hit the edge of their comfort zone, instead of risking a unilateral decision to go outside, they come and see you.

They have learned that this is the safest thing to do, and not only that, but that they will be rewarded for coming. Yes, rewarded. They have learned that if they venture outside their comfort zone and it goes wrong, you will give them that funny little judgemental look that says 'you did *what?!*' and you will be all hurt and cross that they went ahead without clearing it with you first, because if they had you could have saved them

Actually the saddest thing here is that maybe our people have learned that if they venture outside their comfort zone and take a risk (showing the initiative that you are always asking of them) and it goes right, you might still sanction them! It sounds like this: *You took a real risk and actually you were lucky it worked this time, but in future you need to run that sort of thing past me, or at the very least inform me in advance so I am prepared in case I get challenged by my boss.* We say that we trust people and that we want them to use their initiative, but do we actually reward that behaviour when they do?

But do we 'reward' mistakes? Maybe the reality is that the reward for coming to ask what they already know is, of course, that you treat them well. You are in fact flattered that they have come to you in such circumstances because it reinforces your position in the hierarchy. You do after all possess greater wisdom and experience, and what's the point if they don't come and ask you sometimes?

There is something a bit Machiavellian going on here. If they come to you and you engage and give them the answer, then you are on the hook when it goes wrong. They manipulate you into being co-responsible for their objectives.

So if we want to stop this behaviour we have to change the risk–reward paradigm. Instead of rewarding them for coming when they know the answer we have to make *this* the situation they do not want to experience, and conversely reward them for coming to us when stepping outside their comfort zone. If someone comes to me as their coach when they are still inside their comfort zone, they are going to get short shrift. If they come when they need me to hold them outside their comfort zone, they will get rewarded. They will quickly come to understand the behaviour that gets rewarded. And for me that means I have to work hard to be ruthlessly consistent in ensuring my words and my actions match.