Coach, Leader, or Manager

Do You Have to Choose One?

BY MILLIE FULLER

As the business world evolves, so does what is expected of those who lead and support teams. It's not enough to be polished, professional, or simply punctual.

There are three commonly used terms in management—coaching, managing, and leading. While these are often used synonymously, they have different functions and approaches to motivate, develop, and drive team members. In this article, we'll explore the differences and similarities.

Determining which of the three to use, and when, is complex and challenging, but the information presented here will give you a clearer understanding.

WHAT IS A MANAGER?

Managers oversee the operations of a team, department, or organization. They perform a variety of tasks to ensure that the business runs smoothly and achieves its objectives. These include:

Planning. Management involves comprehensive planning and goal setting. The process begins with analyzing the current situation and making future projections. This evaluation allows managers to formulate strategies and set goals that drive the organization toward success.

Budgeting. Having a clear understanding of a department's or project's financial needs means that resources can be allocated appropriately, and goals made achievable. This is where a formal budget proves invaluable. Identifying the necessary expenses and planning accordingly involves an analysis of past and present data, as well as projections to determine future outlay. Furthermore, doing so helps to monitor progress, enabling managers to adjust if necessary.

Setting key performance indicators. KPIs are metrics that help in measuring the progress of a project, the business, or an individual. These metrics are established to track progress and enable data-driven decisions, assisting managers in performance management.

Managing performance. Managers carry out performance reviews of team members to evaluate the quality of their work,

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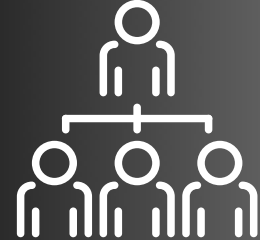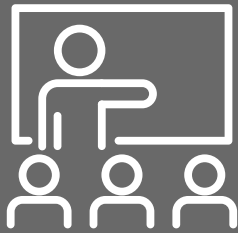
skills, and areas of potential improvement. Before, during, and after performance reviews, constructive feedback is an indispensable tool for continuous performance management and creating a culture of learning and development.

In the event of unsatisfactory performance, however, implementing a performance improvement plan (PIP) may be necessary. This involves outlining clearly where performance needs to be improved, setting timely and measurable goals for the team member, and outlining steps necessary to achieve them.

Organizing and staffing. Managers are often involved in hiring. This not only means conducting the interviews but also outlining the responsibilities of each role and producing a specification. To further support team members, policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) may need to be created to provide guidance on best practices, quality standards, and more.

Promoting order and stability. One of the key responsibilities of a manager is to ensure that consistent results are produced by the team. As a role model, managers set the tone for workplace culture and behavior. By modeling the expectations and demonstrating the desired behaviors, they can influence their team to follow suit.

WHAT IS A COACH?

At its core, being a coach is about helping people to develop their skills, knowledge, and capabilities. When coaching team members, you do not just provide them with instructions or tell them what to do. A coach asks questions that ultimately help team members to achieve on their own.

The GROW Coaching Model, developed in the 1980s by Graham Alexander, Alan Fine, and Sir John Whitmore, provides a framework:

Goals. What do you want to achieve?

Reality. What's the current situation?

Options. What can we do to reach the goal?

Will. What can we commit to?

In the first stage of the GROW model, Goals, the coach and the team member work together to define and articulate desired outcomes. This involves identifying specific, measurable, and achievable goals that align with the individual's personal and professional aspirations.

In the Reality stage of the model, the coach helps the team member assess the current situation to identify anything that might impact their ability to achieve their goals. This includes the person's strengths and weaknesses and any barriers or constraints that need to be addressed.

The Options stage involves brainstorming and exploring various strategies and approaches that could help the team member achieve their goals. The coach encourages the employee to think creatively and consider different possibilities.

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Lastly, the Will stage involves the team member committing to a specific course of action, with the support and guidance of the coach. This includes setting milestones, timelines, and action plans that enable them to move toward their goal(s).

WHAT IS A LEADER?

The work of a leader is all about change. According to business leader John Mattone in his June 6, 2022 blog article, "History's 5 Best Leaders," a leader guides and influences others to deliver on a vision of theirs or another's. The specifics of the vision are unclear due to never having been done before.

Leaders must:

Motivate and inspire others. A leader's inspirations can take various forms, such as personal anecdotes or motivational speeches.

Align and bring people together. A leader should know how to align and integrate individuals from various backgrounds into one cohesive group. This demands keen analytical skills, excellent communication, and empathy.

Establish direction. A leader must establish a clear direction that is unique, realistic, and achievable. Without a clear sense of direction, a team's endeavors can lose momentum and direction.

Promote change. To create and bring about change, a leader must tackle fears of the unknown. New circumstances and possibilities can then be embraced, leading to novel approaches.

MANAGE, COACH, OR LEAD?

Managing, coaching, and leading are three distinct approaches, each with a different impact and different results. Rarely is just one approach used, even in the same conversation. In reality, people need to constantly change their approach according to organizational factors and their own skills and experience.

The organization's current goals will change what a manager focuses on. In general:

Leadership is needed in times of change and uncertainty. It requires someone who can provide clarity, direction, and a sense of purpose to their team. Effective leaders have a clear vision for their team to believe in and are able to communicate it in a way that motivates and excites. Furthermore, leaders must be able to adapt to changing circumstances, think creatively, and make decisions quickly during times of uncertainty.

Managing the status quo means maintaining efficiency and stability within the organization. This demands a different set of skills, such as an operational mindset, a keen eye for detail, and the ability to make data-driven decisions.

Coaching is all about developing people and helping teams to reach their full potential. It's particularly important as organizations need to continually upskill and reskill their workforce to stay competitive. Effective coaching equips employees with the necessary skills, strategies, and tools to enhance their own performance.

IDENTIFYING WHERE TASKS AND SKILLS FIT

Certain tasks naturally fall under coaching, managing, or leading by their nature.

Leading tasks typically involve communicating. For example, conveying team goals. Strong leaders inspire the team to work together to reach a common goal. They have a clear vision, which instills a sense of unity and purpose among the team.

On the other hand, **coaching tasks** focus on people development. For example, helping individual team members identify their skills or address behaviors that are hindering performance. Coaches can provide emotional support and encouragement.

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Managing tasks are more administrative in nature. For example, organizing the staff rota. Effective managers are able to prioritize tasks, delegate responsibilities appropriately, and maintain a sense of order and structure within the team.

Skills can also be categorized as leading, coaching, or managing. Although communication is a skill needed and used in all three of the approaches, the way in which we do so depends on whether we're leading, coaching, or managing:

Leading. Conveying the significance of the grand scheme and vision demands a passionate employment of short sentences, hand gestures, and inclusive language. The leader inspires the team by explicitly articulating the objectives and goals with an unwavering conviction.

Coaching. The focus here is on the team member's growth and development. According to Scotwork in "Is Body Language Important in Negotiation?," coaches should adopt body language that mimics the individual they're guiding, putting the person at ease and facilitating an open conversation. The team member is encouraged to reflect and respond to introspective questions, which elicits greater insight.

Managing. A task-driven approach necessitates clear and concise wording with a neutral body language that focuses entirely on the completion of the task at hand. The manager has a structured approach, sets deadlines, and prioritizes tasks, which creates a framework for the team to follow.

THE ROLE OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness in the mainstream means living in the moment. However, in a business setting, it allows for nonjudgmental observation of the situation without emotion. In this way, it allows us to choose the best action objectively.

Employees can develop a sense of heightened awareness and attention to detail simply by embracing mindfulness in the workplace. Individuals are encouraged to view their thoughts and emotions as temporary phenomena that can be observed and managed, rather than feeling overwhelmed or ruled by them. This can lead to a more productive environment where individuals are able to work through any challenges that may arise in a rational and composed manner.

It's often an unconscious choice to apply and use our natural abilities. B. Leach, in a July 12, 2021 blog post, "Born Leaders vs. Made Leaders: Are Leaders Born or Trained?," states that it can be both: A person can be born with natural leadership abilities and can learn how to be a good leader at work. While we tend to lean into what we know best or where we're strongest, behaviors can be learned, developed, and overridden with deliberate practice and effort.

Furthermore, this process doesn't have to be formal. It can be achieved informally through peer-to-peer mentoring, shadowing, or reading relevant literature.

Coaching, managing, and leading are terms often used synonymously in business, yet each is a distinct approach with different uses and impact. Leaders inspire others to see the bigger picture, managers get the task done through directing, and coaches help others to help themselves.

Which one you choose to employ will be down to organizational and personal factors. You may even use all three approaches in the course of one conversation, beginning with directing what you see as needing to be done, asking the team member how they think they'll do it, and ending by explaining how these goals fit into the wider goals of the business to emphasize the importance of the task. AQ

Millie Fuller is a creative copywriter.

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