

Organisations are better places when leaders coach

Coaching, not controlling, is a compelling way for leaders to improve team performance. Leaders who coach create and grow trust. When trust is high, people are engaged and energised. They work harder, for longer and are more productive.

Leaders who coach double their engagement scores

In *Declining Global Productivity Growth: The Fix*, Jim Clifton wrote: “What if... we doubled the number of engaged workers...? It begins by changing what leaders believe. And then changing how they lead.”²

Leaders are under great pressure to produce results at a faster pace, using fewer resources and where there are many more options to choose from. Unfortunately, most leaders react to this by adopting a command-and-control style of leadership. The pressure takes them over. They don't delegate enough, they become overworked themselves and end up feeling overburdened. Teams disengage from leaders who control. Rather

than increasing their performance, their work output falls and they become discouraged. Efforts by command-and-control leaders to produce more become counterproductive. Instead, they and their teams produce less, and increase the risk of burn-out.

Leaders who coach approach their responsibilities very differently. They focus on the team and how the team can be supported to produce better results. Rather than command and control, they develop and support.

Leaders who coach grow trust

Trust is cultivated when leaders take the time to show interest in supporting and developing others. Delegation is a good proxy for trust. When leaders readily delegate work and responsibility to their team members they show them that they trust them.



Letting go of control

Amy was invited to accept a senior leadership role for which she had no technical training. She took up the challenge, but she had doubts about her fit for the role – and so did her team members. They worked in a security function, and for many years they hadn't seen much change in how they operated. The former manager had been a technical expert who had spent all of his career in security. Amy's team members were all technical security experts.

About two years into the role, Amy was continuing to question whether this was a good fit for her. She felt that she needed to be tougher and more controlling and assert herself as the leader. She had a fairly blunt and direct style anyway, and she felt she needed to keep it ramped up.

While this behaviour seemed to be expected, the feedback was that she overdid it, and this was very frustrating.

Then, a critical incident occurred. A large theft occurred in one of the regional teams. Amy worked with her Regional Manager and their team to deal with this. They followed the process and executed the response plan. But the HR team stepped in to challenge the way a particular staff member was dealt with. Rather than approaching the Regional Manager, HR came directly to Amy in Head Office.

Initially, Amy was ready to charge in to defend the actions of the Regional Manager as being 'the right thing to do'. From her point of view, things had gone very well. The theft situation had been well controlled. She wanted to make sure that her team's actions were properly understood and they didn't experience blowback. She had put on her armour to go into battle.

Luckily, we just happened to have a coaching session scheduled the morning prior to the showdown. The upshot of our coaching session was that Amy decided to reframe the intervention from HR. Rather than being something she needed to control, she saw it as an opportunity her team and HR could learn from. She saw that she needed to step out of the way for that to happen.

And she did. She told HR that she wouldn't be meeting with them, but that her Regional Manager and his team would be. She spoke with her Regional Manager, told him what was happening and why. She spoke with the Head of HR and asked that they to do the same.

What did Amy do differently?

Looking back at the case study, Amy learned a new way of dealing with a challenging situation. By letting go of control,

and trusting her Regional Manager to manage the internal fallout, she did several things.

1. Amy tried on a coaching cap. She redefined her role from manager to expert and let her Regional Manager be the expert in a situation that had occurred in his patch. She set out to coach him in how to manage the situation.
2. By setting up a learning frame, she focused attention on the future, and what is possible, rather than on the past and what was done.
3. This enabled the focus of action to be on opportunities rather than mistakes.
4. She didn't use her power in a coercive way as she first intended, to prove that her way was the right way. By stepping back, she showed trust in her Regional Manager by delegating responsibility back where it belonged. She spoke to him about what she was doing and why she was doing it, and she offered him guidance and support. The discussion between the Regional Manager and HR was on how they could ensure that everyone's needs were met if such a situation occurred again.

Amy's mindset had shifted to be more open. It was more collaborative and generous, thinking: how can we make this work? This event had unexpected flow-on benefits. Shifting to a coaching mindset meant Amy didn't have to be the security expert. She felt more congruent in her role as a coach. She could spend her time being more strategic and innovative, rather than trying to learn a new functional skill – a skill that her team had in abundance. She trusted more, delegated more.

She told her team her story of how she had felt a lack of fit, why she was no longer going to try to fit, and why she valued their technical skills. Her relationship with her team members became deeper. She showed greater trust in the team (and herself) by delegating more to them. The team has repaid that by generating more ideas, making more suggestions and taking more leadership actions. Amy continues to take a coaching rather than a controlling stance, and this is spreading out to other stakeholders in the business.

She's living the differences between a commanding, directive culture and an empowering, coaching culture (see Figure 1.1 below). She's feeling more congruent, is growing relationships that are more positive, and giving herself space to sweat the big stuff.

Figure 1.1 – Command-and-control vs coaching leadership styles

	Commanding culture	Coaching culture
Roles	Manager as expert	Person as expert on self
Time	The past: what holds me back?	The future: what propels me forward?
Actions	Mistakes: what went wrong?	Opportunities: what do we need/want?
Power	Coercion: do it my way	Attraction: how will you do it?
Mindset	Show me how it will work	How can we make this work?

It's clear that coaching produces better results than a command-and-control leadership style. Yet the command-and-control style continues to be used. Why? Because coaching goes against the grain for many leaders. While 80% of organisations say they are keen to develop a coaching culture, a coaching style goes against the grain for many of them too³. They continue to reward command-and-control styles. A core proposition of command-and-control is that the people at the top make the decisions and others aren't to be trusted. This is just bad for business.

The key reasons that leaders like Amy don't coach more is they are:

- ▶ captured by everyday pressures to produce results;
- ▶ not confident in their coaching capability; and
- ▶ unclear or unaware of the connection between coaching, team engagement and productivity.

When trust is high, engagement is high and more work gets done

The connection between high team engagement and superior organisational performance is well known. Engaged teams show 24% to 59% less turnover in staff, 70% fewer safety incidents occur and there's 41% less absenteeism than in disengaged teams. Engaged teams enjoy 10% higher customer ratings and 21% greater profitability⁴. A 5% increase in engagement equals a 3-point increase in revenue growth in the following year⁵.

Gallup global engagement meta-analysis shows that top quartile business units double the productivity of bottom quartile units. Those at the 99th percentile have four times the success of those at the bottom percentile⁶.

Gallup’s analytics show that less than a third of the workforce is engaged⁷. About one quarter (24%) in their research are actively disengaged⁴. Only 14% of Australian and New Zealand employees show up to work each day “with enthusiasm and the motivation to be highly productive”⁸.

Most organisations could substantially improve performance through improved engagement.

Coach more and make your organisation a better place to be

Leaders can make the biggest difference to engagement. Leaders who coach enrol the disengaged and the doubtful. When leaders have the right coaching skills, and coach frequently, they generate engaged and empowered work teams (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 – How coaching leads to greater engagement and work effort

Coaching	Engagement	Work effort	
Very frequently	Empowered	4 x	Lead
Frequently	Engaged	2 x	
Occasionally	Enrolled	1	Manage
Rarely	Doubtful	½ x	
Never	Disengaged	¼ x	

Jim Clifton, in his popular Chairman's Blog, said *"Leaders are the biggest part of the problem with engagement. They are responsible for 70% of the variance in workplace culture."*⁹

Bad bosses are the biggest single reason people leave organisations. Leaders carry the biggest responsibility for workplace culture and productivity¹⁰. The biggest challenge to productivity is that the practice of management hasn't changed in 30 years⁹. Management practices need to change for productivity to change.

Gallup's and other research also shows that great bosses are the biggest single reason people stay in organisations. According to the research, the team leader is the silver bullet for engagement and productivity¹⁰. Top team leaders contribute about 48% higher profitability to their companies than average managers¹¹. They do that by creating a high development experience for their team.

If you do not already have good engagement with your teams, coaching can help you achieve it. And if engagement is already good, coaching will help you to get more work done.

If you coach more, you will create a workplace that everyone enjoys more.

Bad bosses are the biggest single reason people leave organisations... great bosses are the biggest single reason people stay in organisations.

Each section in this book has activities that help you translate the tips and tools into action. Below is the first. All the activities are designed to turn your reading into learning and

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your practice into competence. You might make it a goal to do all the activities, or just a few. It's your choice.



Activity

1. Review your team's engagement scores. How actively engaged are your team members?
2. What improvement would you like to see in the engagement of your team?