



# What Coaching Can Bring to Your Role

chapter  
ONE

**W**e define coaching as a process that supports individuals to make more conscious decisions and to take new action. It helps them to identify and build on their strengths and internal resources and moves them forward from where they are to where they want or need to be. Coaching supports reflection, awareness, communication, and accountability.

We receive countless requests from nonprofit managers seeking support in managing staff. The requests usually look something like this:

- This person is doing a good job, but how can I get her to step into a larger position of leadership?
- My staff members are asking for more feedback on their work. Some of them say they don't know where they stand. What can I do about this?
- How can I delegate better when I don't have time and it's easier to do it myself?
- I need to have a difficult conversation with someone I manage. What do I do?
- Our organization is flat and doesn't have a lot of career paths available. What is the best way to provide professional development for staff so I can keep them engaged?

- I'm feeling that I need to do everything for this person. How can I help her to stop asking me what to do and take on more accountability so I can get to my own work?

We hear many more questions, but these are some of the highlights. And these are merely the presenting issues. When we dig deeper, we find that nonprofit managers are really struggling with some fundamental skills. They are spending a great deal of their time telling staff what to do so they can get back to their own work (the traditional *working manager* role), but they are spending very little time helping their staff to learn and grow on the job. As a result, they become frustrated because their staff aren't doing anything different.

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*A central task of leadership is learning to support  
the growth of others.*

—Stephen Preskill and Stephen Brookfield, 2009, p. 61

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What we believe has been missing from the equation is coaching. Although working with an external, one-on-one coach has its benefits (see Chapter Seven for more information on this type of coaching), we've seen how bringing coaching skills into an organization can have a much greater impact on staff commitment and the achievement of organizational goals.

According to a study by BlessingWhite, the relationship between a manager and staff is the most critical and reliable option for building strong organizations. "To achieve results and to keep employees engaged, coaching is a practice that requires relatively little investment, is infinitely adaptable, and is inherently personalized" (BlessingWhite, 2008, p. 3). Ongoing coaching is technically a part of any manager's role, but it has yet to be embraced as much as it could be in the sector due to lack of exposure and training.

In this chapter, we discuss

- What a coaching manager does differently
- Using the coaching approach to manage others
- What coaching is not

- How coaching differs from other ways of developing staff
- Opportunities to coach
- An example of coaching (a scenario)
- The specific approach we'll be using

## WHAT A COACHING MANAGER DOES DIFFERENTLY

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*Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.*

—John Whitmore, 2002

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Managers who use the coaching approach with their staff help them to develop their thinking, find new possibilities, and grow their abilities. These managers support others to learn on the job. Here are some key ways these managers approach leading others:

- They provide a space for reflecting and learning.
- They engage others to solve their own problems or reach their own solutions.
- They identify and build on an individual's internal resources and strengths.
- They use coaching to create accountability.
- They use coaching to support adult learning and the development of others.

Many nonprofit managers we've worked with say they initially thought coaching meant sitting around talking and never really getting any work done. But in our nonprofit work, the focus is on action and results: How many clients did we serve? Did we complete the program on time? How much money have we raised? Nonprofit managers are often so busy they tend to focus on *doing*. To them,

coaching can seem a waste of time. Or they may think coaching is about telling and showing people what to do, as a sports coach does on the field. Though getting results is important, and telling people what to do has its place, all this doing and telling can easily lead to the trap of focusing instantly on problem solving or giving quick advice so people will get back to work and do more, more, more. But more *doing* doesn't always mean better outcomes. Managers who use the coaching approach find they attain better results in the long run.

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*Coaching creates an opening in communication that being directive does not. It invites conversation, problem solving, and a realization on the part of those being coached that they are active participants in the process. The people I supervise ultimately become more self-sufficient. They come to rely on their own judgment and become less dependent on me. They also pass along the skills they learn to the people they supervise. It has contributed to my confidence as a supervisor.*

—Pat Swartz, program manager, Girls Inc. of Alameda County

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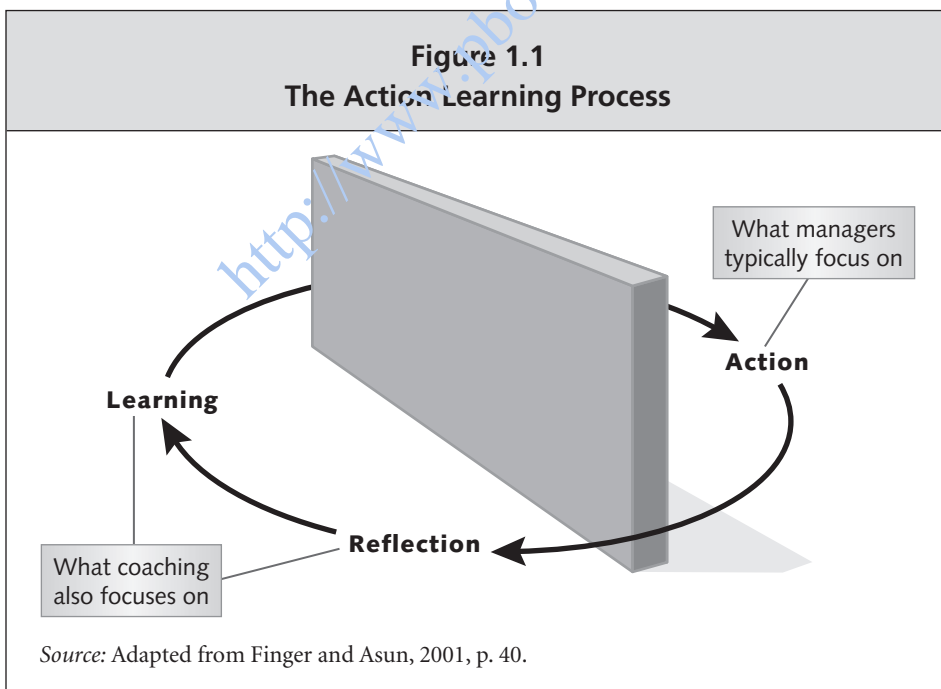
### **Coaching Managers Support Reflection and Learning**

Though we are all here to get the job done, most of us need to learn and grow along the way. A basic assumption of adult learning is that adults have a great deal of life experience and learn best when they can be in dialogue with a person and reflect about that experience. In this way, they will learn new knowledge, skills, or attitudes (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2005).

Remember the example we shared in the introduction about Michael, the development director who thought his meeting with the funder was dismal? He needed to reflect on the action he had just taken. He knew he could do something more or better, but he couldn't figure it out alone. A coaching manager would ask him questions like, "What worked?" "What didn't work?" "What would

you do differently next time?” As a coaching manager, you would support him to reflect and to think. From reflection, new realizations are born and learning happens. Learning leads to more successful actions, such as making more time for the next meeting, getting to know the funder, or practicing the presentation with a colleague. This type of critical reflection can also reinforce what Michael did well and may want to do more of. When he knows what he does well and *why* he does it, he will be operating from a place of greater self-awareness. This process of using reflection-based awareness and learning to lead to new and better actions is called *action learning*, and it is graphically represented in Figure 1.1.

More often than not, managers tend to focus exclusively on the action part of this process. That’s because all of us are more concerned with results than with what led to those results. When managers focus exclusively on results, they miss opportunities to support the learning and development of the individuals they manage. This focus cuts them off from the reflection and learning process. A coaching approach supports the whole action learning process, not just action. According to Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline* (2006), adults learn best



from each other. They do this by reflecting on how they address problems, question assumptions, and receive feedback. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations similarly acknowledges these characteristics as best practices for identifying successful leaders: “[Successful leadership development] embraces an ‘action learning’ or ‘learning-by-doing’ focus, supporting and creating opportunities for participants to apply acquired knowledge and skills to real challenges facing their organizations” (Enright, 2006, p. 3). When you use the coaching approach, you provide the space and support for reflection and learning to happen.

### **Coaching Managers Encourage Others to Solve Their Own Problems**

“Coaching provides conditions that are ideal for adult problem solving and learning. In the midst of continual change and development, people rarely struggle because they lack some key piece of information or some precise procedure from a course or a book. Rather, they often get stuck in how they think and feel about themselves or their situations” (McNamara, 2001, p. 68).

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*Reeling in my natural desire to solve my coworkers' problems or offer advice helped me to identify the strengths of my team members, each of whom problem solves in her or his own unique and effective way. I do not have superior problem-solving skills, merely a different methodology. As a leader, it is my responsibility to bring out the best in my team members, not to create carbon copies of myself.*

—Michael Dismuke, property supervisor,  
Eden Housing Management, Inc.

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Coaching assumes that the individual being coached does not need to be given all the answers. In other words, when you use the coaching approach you assume the “person with the problem is the expert on the problem” (McNamara, 2001, p. 2) and simply needs support to find her or his own answers. Leadership coach and author David Rock (2006) stresses this point, emphasizing that

the best leaders bring out the best performance in others: “They improve their employees’ thinking—literally improving the way their brains process information—without telling anyone what to do. Improving thinking is one of the fastest ways to improve performance” (p. xv).

When a staff member comes into your office with a goal or a problem on an especially busy day, you may think, *What’s the fastest way to get her out of my office so I can get back to work?* Or perhaps you think, *Oh goody, a distraction! Let me solve this for her.* In either case, as you read this, you may think it would be a whole lot easier just to solve her problem or give her some advice. Saves time, doesn’t it? If you think this way, you are not alone. Lots of people operate like this. It’s so easy to focus on problems and problem solving. In fact, it’s natural. As David Rock (2006) points out, neurological research verifies this fix-it mentality. Our brains love to find associations, connections, and links between bits of information. When we do this, our brains give off alpha waves, which have been found to correlate with the release of the neurotransmitter serotonin, a chemical that increases relaxation and eases pain. In other words, it feels good. The upside of this is that it feels good to make connections and learn. The downside is that our brains like it *so much* that we may naturally want to do the thinking and make connections for everyone around us! So we get paid to fix problems *and* it feels good to do so. This may be especially true for nonprofit managers who extend that fix-it orientation to problems in our society such as homelessness, poverty, and civil rights infringements.

Focusing on fixing people’s problems can have a number of drawbacks. First, let’s look at what it means for you as a manager. When you begin to fix the problem for someone else, whose problem does it become? Yours! All of a sudden, that person’s challenge, goal, or problem is sitting in your lap, and you’re the one who put it there. We work with many stressed-out, overwhelmed nonprofit managers who can’t understand how they ended up dealing with so many problems; in reality, they are the ones who keep taking on their staff’s issues. And let’s not kid ourselves—most managers are not doing staff any favors by taking on those issues. By letting people think through their own issues, you support their learning (as we mentioned earlier).

Let’s return to an example we used earlier. Michael, the development director, knows something is not quite right. He’s already starting to think about what happened. If you were to simply tell him what to do, you might say something like, “It’s important to our fundraising efforts to get this particular funder

on board. You need to really prepare next time.” You might also go into problem solving and offer suggestions, like talking to another staff member who knows the funder. These things may or may not be helpful, depending on what Michael has already tried.

When you coach, you pull an individual to a place of possibility. Your questions become, “What will increase your confidence next time?” “What do you need to change to make that happen?” “What else can you do?” Coaching managers attempt to avoid problem solving themselves and telling others what to do. Instead, they focus more on supporting others to process their own experience and find their own answers. Doesn’t this sound better?

### **Coaching Managers Support Others’ Strengths**

There’s a great deal of research suggesting that we are all at our best when we play to our unique strengths and talents. This includes the work of Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, coauthors of the best seller *First, Break All the Rules* (1999), and Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton (considered the father of strengths psychology), coauthors of another best seller, *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (2001). The strengths-based approach assumes the best way to develop people—and gain the greatest return on investment—is to identify how they most naturally think, feel, and behave as unique individuals. Coaching capitalizes on this assumption, supporting individuals to identify and become more comfortable with their individual talents and strengths. Again, if you were managing Michael, you would already know he’s thinking about his deficiencies and how he didn’t pull off the meeting as planned. When you coach him, it’s good to help him recall the strengths he does bring to the table. Perhaps he’s good at organizing data and research. He might be a strong proposal writer. He might have good relationships with other people. As you coach, you remember his strengths and leverage what he can do to support what he has not yet tried to apply to this situation.

Now, let’s not kid ourselves. Everyone is responsible for fulfilling a job description. If a program manager hates budgeting but it’s part of her job, she still has to deliver. However, a coaching manager would support the program manager to identify what in that job description she is best at and then determine how to manage for the rest (like budgeting) so she can spend the majority of her time doing the things she excels at. This might involve strategies like partnering with a team member who has a talent for numbers or asking a peer to proof her budgets before she submits them.

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*At first I really struggled with not jumping in to giving advice and directing folks. But when I started asking questions and really engaging with a healthy sense of curiosity, I was truly rewarded by all the wonderful ideas my staff came up with. I realized I had been cutting off a whole source of creative and effective resolutions!*

—Julia Wilson, Public Interest Clearinghouse  
and the Legal Aid Association of California

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The International Coach Federation shares that a primary assumption of coaching should be that the person being coached is naturally creative and resourceful. In other words, people are not broken and in need of fixing. They merely need support to tap into their potential. This could be encouraging a site coordinator to trust her instinct when it comes to working with a client or helping a program manager think through how to put together an advocacy campaign. Not every person can become an expert in all areas of a job, yet each of us has gifts to contribute. Coaching can support staff to reach their best performance.

### **Coaching Managers Support Accountability**

Don't worry. Coaching is not just about reflection and learning, and helping people focus on strengths (although, we feel those are some essentials that are often ignored in traditional supervision). Coaching also supports someone to move from that learning to a new action or behavior to taking responsibility for their actions. As a part of this process, coaching also supports the development of self-responsibility and task ownership—in other words, accountability by the individual being coached. Accountability can be created in different ways. With Michael, you might discuss what his original goal was in this situation. You help him to ensure that goals and outcomes are clear to him and you. Next, you might help him identify a structure to measure his own progress and results. Then you could ask him what he actually feels or knows he will do differently next time. We'll talk about how to do this in Chapter Three, "The Coaching Framework."

At a deeper level, accountability can be created by allowing people to reach their own solutions. When people decide for themselves what to do, they are more likely to actually follow through than if someone else suggests or advises that they do the same thing.

## USING THE COACHING APPROACH TO MANAGE OTHERS

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*Coaching allows time for exploring and getting to know one another on a deeper level so that the supervisory relationship can be stronger.*

—Susie M. Rivera, director, High Touch Division,  
FLY Program (Fresh Lifelines for Youth)

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As we mentioned in the introduction to this book, traditional managers tend to consider themselves *working managers* who are responsible for program delivery and spend far less, if any, time on developing others. Sure, they see themselves as supervisors, but supervisors do have to both get things done themselves *and* get things done through others. Many managers share that they often don't have time to supervise and develop staff when all their time is spent delivering programs. In fact, many managers say that having to do both gets in the way of their "real work" of fulfilling the mission. Typically, those who consider themselves working managers will relegate the management of others strictly to staff supervision, making sure goals are clear, contracting for roles, and conducting evaluations. In Chart 1.1 we discuss the traditional role of the supervisory manager and the role of a manager who is adding the coaching approach to his or her work with others. Compare the difference between the supervisory manager and the coaching manager.

What do you notice about the left-hand side of Chart 1.1? On this side the supervisory manager starts with establishing structure, setting forth plans, delegating, and monitoring the situation. The supervisory manager provides role contracting and evaluation. Role contracting entails communicating clear job

## CHART 1.1

### Traditional Supervisory Manager Versus Coaching Manager

| Traditional Supervisory Manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Coaching Manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Role Contracting</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>Goal: Work and expectations are mutually agreed on and managers know how to capitalize on individual talents</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communicating job expectations</li><li>• Agreeing on performance goals and standards</li><li>• Agreeing on time frames and workloads (often called a work plan)</li><li>• Establishing professional development goals</li></ul>                                                                                       | <i>Everything on the left plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discovering what is unique about each person</li><li>• Knowing and valuing the unique abilities of staff</li><li>• Turning particular talents into action and performance</li><li>• Providing coaching support to ensure expectations are clear and needs are met</li></ul> |
| <b>Check-ins</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>Goal: Ongoing support and feedback are provided</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reviewing work plan and workloads</li><li>• Assisting with prioritization</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <i>Everything on the left plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilitating thought process that leads to new ideas, options, or actions</li><li>• Giving feedback</li><li>• Identifying additional development needs and desires</li></ul>                                                                                                |
| <b>Evaluation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>Goal: There are no surprises</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analyzing performance through team feedback and Individual performance review</li><li>• Compensation review</li><li>• Discussing potential promotion or added responsibilities</li><li>• Recontracting role for next period, adjusting job description, or creating new work plan</li><li>• Career planning</li></ul> | <i>Everything on the left plus</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Formalizing performance review that has already been provided through ongoing check-ins and coaching support</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                      |

*Note: Duties for role contracting are the same.*

*(Continued)*

| CHART 1.1 (Continued)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Traditional Supervisory Manager Versus Coaching Manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Traditional Supervisory Manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Coaching Manager                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Traditional supervision can result in this:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Using a coaching approach can result in this:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing only on staff members' actions</li> <li>• Driving behavior; feeling that we have to babysit or micromanage staff</li> <li>• Expecting staff will be dependent on us</li> <li>• Spending time pointing out what staff did wrong</li> <li>• Solving staff problems</li> <li>• Taking on staff's work if it's not up to our standards (it's easier to just do it ourselves, right?)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowering staff to take better actions</li> <li>• Eliciting best thinking; challenging staff to step into greater responsibility</li> <li>• Creating an interdependent environment</li> <li>• Working to develop the strengths of staff; asking challenging questions and engaging staff in the answers in order to identify their unique abilities and learn how best to integrate them</li> <li>• Helping staff to solve and prevent problems</li> <li>• Supporting staff to think and grow in order to do their own work</li> </ul> |

Source: Adapted from CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and Coach U, 2008. Copyright by Coach U, Inc. (www.coachu.com). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

expectations, performance goals, and workloads, and establishing a professional development plan. Evaluation entails analyzing your staff member's performance. This usually happens in some form of annual or twice-yearly performance review. When you focus solely on these two things, you are sitting squarely in the traditional working-manager role. When managers have engaged in this type of supervision, they have shared challenges such as, "My staff are too dependent on me," or, "I feel like I have to solve their problems or micromanage them." Some managers have shared that they often end up taking on the work of the other staff member because it's either not up to their standards or it's simply easier to do it themselves. And we've also heard from a number of people

about the tremendous tension that surrounds evaluating staff performance. In some situations, the outcome can be a lot of confusion or a very uncomfortable conversation when it comes time to evaluate performance. At worst, it can be a human resource nightmare when the staff member is surprised by the performance review.

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*Coaching is a process that fosters self-reliance rather than dependence on me.*

—Workshop participant

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Now let's go to the right-hand side of Chart 1.1. The coaching manager starts by assessing who's on board, identifying their strengths and talents that can be leveraged, and focusing on achieving growth and performance for reaching goals. Next, the coaching responsibility is added to role contracting and evaluation. Ongoing coaching and feedback support the individual to achieve results. And—this is very important—this ongoing attention ensures that by the time you get to performance evaluation, there are *absolutely no surprises*. Investing time and attention in ongoing coaching not only supports staff but can prevent potential disagreements. Notice how the actions change when a traditional working manager shifts to being a coaching manager.

By adding the coaching approach, you also pay attention to where the manager and the staff member can partner. We're not suggesting you ignore your positional authority or role as boss. You must always be clear about roles. However, coaching calls on you to become a *thought partner*. Most people actually want another person to think with. When you coach, you can become the thought partner who provides this service. For this moment in time, you are parallel in your relationship. Two of you are thinking for one.

This is not about the old notion of empowerment, where you, as manager, have power and can dispense it to those who don't. You do have positional authority over those you manage. However, when coaching you stand shoulder-to-shoulder in equality. Instead of only dispensing your expertise about the situation, you learn to develop a new set of tools to bring forth the unique talents

of the person you are coaching. This is about partnering with, supporting, and encouraging staff to step into their professional potential.

And coaching is not limited to those you manage. You can coach peers and those you report to. We'll talk more about that in Chapter Six. If you think this whole process sounds very collaborative and highly facilitative, you're right. It is. According to *The Coaching Manager: Developing Top Talent in Business*, "Managers who coach want to help, as opposed to fixing or changing others . . . they show less need for control . . . they believe that most people really do want to learn . . . they show empathy in their dealings with others . . . they are open to personal learning, and to receiving feedback" (Hunt and Weintraub, 2002, p. 42).

## WHAT COACHING IS NOT

Before we dive fully into this book, we need to say a little bit about what coaching is *not*. Coaching is still relatively new to the nonprofit sector and is therefore difficult to fully define. However, we can describe some things that coaching *isn't*:

- Coaching is not therapy.
- Coaching is not punitive or just for performance problems.
- Coaching is not a replacement for good human resource systems.
- Coaching differs from mentoring and training.
- Coaching is not a cookie-cutter approach, and it's not for everyone.

*Coaching is not therapy.* Traditional therapists focus on healing pain, dysfunction, and conflict within an individual or a relationship between two or more individuals through a variety of methods that usually focus on a client's history. As Jeff Kaplan (2007) says, "Therapy often asks, 'Why?' and concerns itself with the client's past. . . . Therapy seeks to fix unresolved issues. . . . Coaching often asks, 'What?' and concerns itself more with the present and future" (p. 1). Kaplan also describes coaches as "collaborators rather than experts." The International Coach Federation (2008) describes traditional therapy as focusing on resolving difficulties arising from the past which hamper an individual's emotional functioning in the present, improving overall psychological functioning, and dealing with present life and work circumstances in

more emotionally healthy ways. The primary focus of coaching is on creating actionable strategies for achieving specific goals in one's work or personal life. The emphasis in a coaching relationship is on learning, action, accountability, and follow through.

*Coaching is not punitive or just for performance problems. Coaching is not meant to deal with the ongoing performance problems of a staff person. Coaching is an investment in the development of an individual. Many*

**Figure 1.2**  
**Planet 501c3 Cartoon**



management books focus solely on working with difficult situations or people. Our approach is different. This is not a book to help you fix your “broken” or “problem” staff. We are starting with the assumption that you are working with people you want to invest in and develop (if you’re not, you may want to take a look at the scenarios for coaching an exit in Chapter Six). There is a huge difference between a staff person who has a learning gap that is coachable and a staff person who has ongoing performance problems that require an HR response. This leads us to the next thing coaching is not.

*Coaching is not a replacement for good human resource systems.* It is meant to complement *good* human resource systems. In other words, if you don’t have good HR policies in place, like how to deal with volatile workplace issues, ethical layoffs, or other termination issues, then coaching might only be a Band-Aid for something.

*Coaching is not a cookie-cutter approach, and it’s not for everyone.* In other words, one size does not fit all when it comes to coaching. Coaching is very much about getting to know the individual sitting in front of you. As we mentioned earlier, the best managers identify what is unique about each individual, and they capitalize on it. Staff don’t want a manager to throw a cookie-cutter approach at them. They need someone to adjust to their individual needs. But coaching is not for everyone. The person you coach needs to be fairly open to learning and growth. If that’s not the case, this could be an uphill battle. We share a way to deal with this in Chapter Six.

## HOW COACHING DIFFERS FROM OTHER WAYS OF DEVELOPING STAFF

When it comes to developing others, there are lots of choices. Training is probably the first resource managers look toward to develop staff. We happen to be big fans of training and see it as a wonderful resource for sharing knowledge or modeling procedures to increase proficiency. However, it’s not for everyone or every situation. As the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) puts it, “Training is something that is done to others. It *pushes* knowledge, attitude, and skills that are essential to successful work performance” (Rothwell, 2008, p. 3). Coaching *pulls* knowledge, attitude, and skills from a person. This helps implement what was learned in the classroom. The odds of achieving

behavior change in a one- or two-day workshop are fairly slim. In fact, Princeton University shares that only 10 percent of learning and development should come from formal training. The rest should come from on-the-job experience, problem solving, and feedback (Office of Human Resources, Princeton University, 2009).

Coaching often happens after training to provide the opportunity to practice and obtain constructive feedback regarding the subject matter. This is where behavior change can start to take hold. Nonprofit consultant and trainer Carter McNamara (2005) shares that even if a person goes so far as to get a master's degree in business administration, it will be of little use unless he or she can apply that learning. "In order for the learning process to succeed, the individual must be willing to be open to new ideas, be able to share doubts and fears about new information and situations, apply the new information to current and real-world challenges, and then learn, especially by asking themselves and others powerful questions about their experience" (p. 218). This is where coaching comes in.

Mentoring is another development resource for staff that we absolutely encourage, particularly for emerging leaders in the sector. The purpose of mentoring is to groom an individual to fill a role by teaching proven methods and to introduce the person being mentored to a network of contacts that will help him or her succeed. In *Working Across Generations*, Frances Kunreuther, Helen Kim, and Robby Rodriguez (2008) describe a mentor as "someone who gives a sense of perspective and history, offers advice, and shares contacts and influence" (p. 129). We're big fans of mentoring, but be aware that it is not synonymous with coaching.

We've heard people describe a mentor as someone who walks through the door *before* another person, whereas a coach walks through the door *with* that person. Moreover, a coach doesn't necessarily need to have formal experience in the role of the person he or she is coaching in order to be an effective coach. Given the changing nature of how people need to work, the construct of mentoring could be expanded to consider a more participative opportunity. You can add coaching to the mentoring experience by supporting people to translate your advice into real action for themselves. You can listen to how they think about things, give them questions to ponder, help them figure out where to go for resources, and give them feedback as necessary.

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*Staff are at the heart of mission delivery,  
so it pays to invest in their development.*

—Peter Brinckerhoff, 2007, p. 19

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If you are responsible for supervising staff, you are also responsible for developing them. We all have opportunities to help others develop, whether they report to us or not. And coaching will give you a simple tool to use in many conversations to expand what you have to offer those who work with and for you.

## **OPPORTUNITIES TO COACH**

Coaching opportunities are everywhere. Coaching can be done informally in the hallway, during a phone call, or just before a meeting with funders. It can also take place in a more formal, regular one-on-one meeting or quarterly development conversation. It may take a few minutes, or you may be able to put aside an hour. Coaching may occur once or on an ongoing basis.

Here are some examples of potential opportunities to coach:

- You know the person who reports to you has been excited for weeks about standing up to speak in front of your major donors. Right before she goes on, she says her confidence is shaky. You step aside with her to help her regain confidence. This is a time to coach.
- Your program manager says he'd like to promote his new idea to help three other programs. You set aside time to help him figure out how. This is a time to coach.
- Your coworker is not working well with other team members. You really want him to find new ways to work better within the group. You ask to help him think through possibilities over lunch. This is a time to coach.
- It is the middle of the year. You're meeting with your team to review progress to date and to plan for the next successful six months. This is a time to coach.
- You have your regular one-on-one meeting with each of your staff members. You listen to what their key concerns and opportunities are, and guide

them as they develop how to manage in the weeks ahead. This is a time to coach.

- Although you don't have authority over the team you've been asked to lead, you see that the group could do with more thinking about the program. The team needs support. This is a time to coach.
- Someone in your group has just had some bad news from a community partner. You want to be there to support her as she works through her disappointment and figures out how to proceed. This is a time to coach.
- One of the resource center volunteers seems to be brash with the distressed parents who call in for help. You ask the volunteer to talk with you about how to optimize support for the parents. New behavior is going to be required. This is a time to coach.
- Someone has just started at your agency. It's time to learn what she knows and doesn't know and how to leverage her strengths for the first few months. This is a time to coach.

For a list of additional coaching opportunities, see Chapter Five, "Knowing When to Use a Coaching Approach." The following example presents a more detailed scenario of a spontaneous coaching moment.

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### AN EXAMPLE OF COACHING: A MOMENT IN THE HALLWAY

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Nisha is nervous. She's new to the team at Active Compassion Now, and she's starting to get frantic about her first meeting tomorrow with Tough Philanthropy International (TPI). She bumps into her manager, Terri, in the corridor.

*Terri:* What's the hurry?

*Nisha:* Tomorrow is the first meeting with TPI. I've heard how they want people to be brilliant and be done quickly. I'm trying to get thoroughly prepared. I want to do a good job.

*Terri:* Good for you. What is the one thing you want to walk away from this first meeting with?

*Nisha:* [Thinks: "I don't want them to think I'm new and don't know what I'm doing. That's why I have way too many confusing

slides.”] I want to know what the funder values more than anything.

*Terri:* How are you going to find that out?

*Nisha:* [Thinks: “I don’t have time for research. I have to tell our story. But wait a moment, I have an idea.”] I could talk to Pascal. He’s worked with them.

*Terri:* Yes, using your network makes sense to me. Is there anything else?

*Nisha:* Yes. I’m wondering if thirty-three slides are too much for a half-hour presentation.

*Terri:* How many do you really think you can go over in half an hour?

*Nisha:* More like ten slides. I’m going to go back and prepare them differently.

*Terri:* Anything else that will help you?

*Nisha:* No, thanks for your help.

*Terri:* It’s your idea to call Pascal and change your slides. And don’t let TPI intimidate you; they mean well. It’s just their style. I have every confidence in you. Let me know how it goes.

*Nisha:* I will.

### **What Just Happened?**

This is what we mean by a coaching moment. It only took a moment. Who had the answers? Who was taking responsibility? Who has developed a new way of working? Who is being more effective? With successful coaching, it is always the individual being coached.

Hard-working Nisha wanted to show TPI that she knew her stuff. She was preparing to tell them everything about Active Compassion Now. But would they have been prepared to listen? If they’re known as a group that demands getting to the point, they wouldn’t have happily sat through a long-winded presentation. She was really more focused on what they thought of her than what she needed to understand about them. It’s easy to get focused on a task. But it’s important to take the time to step back and see if it’s the right task. Coaching gave her clarity. And it took only a few minutes.



## THE APPROACH WE'LL BE USING

Figure 1.3 on the following page illustrates our approach to coaching. This approach involves three factors: (1) developing and using some basic foundational skills, (2) applying those skills to a framework as you coach someone, and (3) embracing the mind-set of a coaching manager.

Pivotal to this coaching approach is the core value of staying curious. The significance of using this inquiry-based methodology will become apparent as we unfold the four primary skills and the framework. The central theme of curiosity will also keep you true to the coaching mind-set, which we discuss later in the book. The goal of this approach is to stay attentive, interested, and open to helping others develop to achieve the mission.

In the next chapter, Chapter Two, we unfold each skill in depth. The coaching framework presented in Chapter Three will give you a structure for your coaching conversations. And the coaching mind-set in Chapter Four will ask you to look at your capacity to coach in terms of how you come across as you manage others.

To get you thinking, you will find a coaching manager self-assessment in Resource A to help you determine your awareness of coaching and how you currently may be using the foundational skills, framework, and coaching mind-set, as you develop other individuals. The score will help you determine what you might want or need to strengthen as you read through this book. Notice where you are already strong and where you might need to put more attention or go deeper. This assessment is specifically for individuals, supervisors, managers, and directors who influence others, whether they have authority over those people or not.

Now that you have some background on what coaching could offer you as a manager and the path we will take to prepare you to coach, let's move on to Chapter Two. In that chapter you will learn and practice the foundational skills of coaching.

**Figure 1.3**  
**Coaching Model**

