THE PERFORMANCE ROOM

theperformancecoach

High Performance Coaching Guide

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High Performance Coaching – your essential guide!

Coaching – a dispensable ingredient in a high performance world?

Imagine this... an international football team with no coach or manager. A top 10 tennis player without a coach. Team GB sailing squad where there’s no coaches to work with the sailors. In the world of elite sport, it’s pretty inconceivable that an athlete or team wouldn’t have a coach. In most instances, there’s a whole team of coaches to help the athlete(s) prepare and perform – a technical coach, a physical coach, a mental coach, a strategist/analyst.... And so the list goes on. If you need to deliver at the top level, the evidence is clear – you need support from coaches to help you do that.

Contrast that with the world of business. In business, there’s the same massive pressure to deliver. Each and every day – it’s relentless. In business there’s less time to practice, reflect, learn, improve – so the need for coaches to support you to extract and apply all your learning so that you’re ready to perform the next day is even greater, isn’t it?

Why then are coaches an exceptional luxury, not an everyday essential? The mindset and thinking around coaches and coaching seems to be very different and to us – incredibly bonkers. Coaching is typically something you get when a) you’re fairly senior; b) you need to improve, cope better or step up in some way; c) others think you need it. We’ve heard (on one or two occasions) the immortal words “I think so-and-so needs some coaching” – which usually means they need to start performing better and delivering a bit more, because they’re not quite cutting the mustard at the moment.

Why this is the case, we’re not quite sure. It possibly stems from some macho cultural belief that asking for help and expertise from outside to perform better and improve is a sign of weakness. To us, it’s a sign of complete craziness. In a world where there are people who tell you what you need to deliver and where you’re constantly reminded of the importance of delivering those targets, to then have minimal support to help you work out how best to do that, more consistently, more frequently, more effectively, seems kind of ludicrous to us.

Sold on coaching?! Let’s get started!

The Coaching Room is full of superb information and practical tools that you can use to help others get better. And the Performance Room is also stuffed full of tools to improve performance - all great resources that you can use to coach and help others get better. This overview piece is a really important starting point. It will:

» Help you understand what coaching is
» Help you know what coaching performance involves
» Introduce you to a simple framework of performance coaching – how it works and what it’s grounded on
» Equip you with the basics to start coaching

There’s two great coaching kitbags in The Performance Room that you can use alongside this – one called **High Impact Performance Coaching** (probably most relevant if you’re having coaching sessions) and **Talking Performance** (focused more on having great quality conversations about performance). We’ve made it easy for you and signposted some really relevant tools in these kitbags throughout this guide, but do also dip into other material in there.
Demystifying coaching

Let’s start by getting to grips with what coaching is. It’s a word that’s used a lot in different contexts and so not surprisingly, there are various different meanings associated with “coaching”.

Coaching broadly seems to be the term given to a process where one person (the coach) helps another person (let’s call them the “coachee” for the moment) to grow, develop, improve or find a solution. There should be a defined goal or aim of coaching – if there’s not, we’d suggest that the coaching probably isn’t as effective as it could be. There’s different forms of coaching – life coaching, executive coaching, leadership coaching, career coaching, sports coaching. The type of coaching dictates the aim and content of coaching – but whatever the type, there’s a few defining features of coaching:

» There’s someone who wants to develop or improve – the coachee – and they’re getting help from a coach – someone who’s aim it is to help them. Both of them are quite clear about this and that there’s coaching going on!

» There’s a clear focus for the coaching, and that’s established at the start.

» Generally, the coach aims to empower the coachee to learn, develop their awareness, and make their own choices. So they’ll ask questions, listen, and challenge more than tell, instruct or give advice.

» The coach should use a particular coaching method or model to coach with, and ideally an approach that’s proven to work!

Performance coaching is all of this, but specifically focused on helping someone perform better – whether that’s at work, in sport, or any achievement arena. The focus is firmly on improvement – doing things better, to achieve better results. You’ll find various definitions of and approaches to performance coaching out there. Our version – which underpins all the material on coaching you’ll find in The Performance Room and The Coaching Room – is based on the approach to coaching taken in elite sport. The next section gives you a bit more on our coaching philosophy, framework and approach, so read on if you’d like to get into the detail.

Performance Coaching – the K2 way

We define performance coaching very simply as “helping the performer get better at doing the things they need to do to get the results they want – more frequently and consistently”. Our approach to performance coaching:

» Is very firmly focused on improvement to deliver better results. Nothing else. The results are very important but coaching is focused on supporting the performer to do the things they need to do to get the results - more consistently, more of the time.

» Helps someone to be more ready to perform, by helping them understand and refine their performance recipe. Other approaches tend to focus on reviewing and reflecting. Ours challenges people to apply their learning in a focused way so that they’re more ready for the next performance

» Is built on the Performance Framework - a very simple framework and illustration of the foundations of high performance – being consistently ready to perform superbly well. For some more detail on the ingredients of high performance, here’s a good guide to start off with. The coach uses the
framework to guide how and what they do in coaching the performer – as detailed in this guide

- Draws from our unique expertise and experience in working with some of the world’s best coaches – and performers – and from our own work, as coaches and psychologists supporting elite performers in sport and business

If you’re the kind of person that likes to delve into the background and theory of things, you’ll want to know what the framework is based on, theoretically. It’s based on stress and coping theory and research in performance psychology. The beautifully simple and logical principle is that our level of stress, and ability to cope and perform is dependent on the balance between the demands we think we face, and the resource we think we have to respond to those demands.

So, when we feel we have the right capability or resource to meet the demands or challenges we face, we’re in good shape – mentally and practically – to perform well. When we think we don’t have the ability to meet the demands we face, we feel stretched and stressed – usually not in a good way (nerves, lack of confidence, worry), and we’ll probably under perform. Conversely, when we think we’ve got too much ability or resource for the demand we’re facing, cue boredom or apathy and that’s a recipe for underperformance. So our ideal performance state is one where there’s a good balance between the perceived demands and our perceived ability to meet those demands.

Notice the word “perceived”. What’s important here is how we see things – our reality of ourselves, our ability, our skill, expertise, choices for action; and the challenge or demand we’re facing.

Using our experience...

This perspective to high performance isn’t just derived from theory. It’s also based on our own and others’ research, and from our extensive experience of working with elite performers in business and sport. So this is evidence-based knowledge that sustained, consistent high performance is linked with:

- being able to quickly, accurately and objectively assess the demands of the task ahead, and have clarity over what’s needed to deliver against those demands
- knowing exactly what resources you’ve got to draw from to meet these demands
- deploying the right resources in the right way to meet the task demands
- constantly building additional resource – learning, improving, acquiring new skills, ways of thinking, maximising your energy, etc – so that you’re ready to face more and different demands in the future.
So the framework – which is shown below – sets out the very simple 4 ingredients (or steps) that are key for someone to be ready to perform to their potential.

1. are really clear on the demand/challenge/task they’re facing – what they need to deliver and what performance is required to deliver it
2. understand and accept the context and conditions they’re in – and use this understanding to help inform no 1.
3. know what resource they’ve got to meet these demands and how best to use that resource. Resource refers to internal resource, rather than just external resource. It’s skills, tactical nous, mindset/thoughts, physical energy and capability, how best to use the environment and people around them
4. look ahead to keep adding to that resource so that they’re ready to anticipate new and different demands they’re likely to face and ensure they’ve got the resource and ability to cope and perform in advance

Sometimes (often!) the demands may outweigh the resources. In this instance, the coach would work with the performer to help them reappraise the demand (so it seems more manageable), increase resource, or – choose their mindset around this balance so that they’re focused on being as ready as they can be to deliver their best performance that will give them the best chance of delivering what’s required or expected of them.

Lastly, the coach will be constantly aiming to help the performer understand their performance recipe so that they can apply these simple principles/recipe to be more ready to perform, more of the time. So a big focus in coaching is exploration, understanding, and learning. The coach judges their success by how well they’re helping the performer develop a repeatable recipe that they can independently review, improve and apply with more impact in the future.
The coaching how

The coaching ‘how’ - the methods and tools used – is secondary to the philosophy and approach (framework) to coaching. Specific tools, techniques and questions are all used in the quest to help the performer get clear on their picture of success, understand and accept their playing conditions, use their available resource to best meet the demands and continue to build resource for the future. A coach ONLY uses a tool or exercise if it helps the performer with any of those things.

The mindset and spirit of the coach is that they’re there to enable and empower the performer, so the coach’s methods and behaviours will be in line with that. A good performance coach will ask great questions, provoke thought, challenge, highlight what they see and hear, and occasionally share thoughts or expertise. They’re not teachers, instructors or advice givers. Their aim is to develop self-aware performers who are making their own decisions, determining their own performance recipe and driving their own improvement.

A great coach always has that coaching mindset. They’re constantly thinking about improving and getting better – and about the opportunities for the performer to do so and to learn more about their own performance. So everything they do and say will be focused on that. On the ground, you’d see them having lots of short frequent conversations with performers about their performance. Conversations to help performers reflect, learn and apply. Conversations to help people be ready for their next performance. Conversations with more than one performer, where performers are encouraged to share their insight with each other. The overall mindset and focus is on improving - and everything is focused on doing that.

Mindset is key

So if you’re interested in being a great performance coach, start with your mindset and spirit. You exist to help people improve. You’re passionate about helping them discover how to perform and improve. If you’ve got that straight, you’re on the right road!