



Coaching the coach pays dividends

Valerie Heritage

Improving sales skills through coaching.

Background

The subject company of this case study is a major subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson. It is one of around 165 healthcare companies owned by it worldwide, each with its own mission and its own identity. The company markets medicines across a wide range of therapeutic areas and has a number of specialist products, which have dramatically improved medical care. It is now ranked among the top ten pharmaceutical companies worldwide and employs over four hundred people in the UK.

Its aims are: to grow faster than the marketplace, to achieve and strengthen its leadership position in all its key therapy areas, to outperform the competition in the quality and standard of service it provides to all its customers, to develop its people continuously, and to deliver its financial commitments.

Training and development mission

In keeping with the company's firm belief in its responsibilities to its employees and their development; it has a specific training mission. This is: *to be the best at attracting, developing and retaining talented*

people in order to achieve its standards and business objectives.

Within this framework is a set of specific, detailed objectives, through which it 'will develop a strong partnership between customer, employee and company to improve individual commitment and performance'.

The challenge

The company has a clear strategy that sales representatives' selling skills need to be improved through coaching. The prime responsibility of its regional business manager is to coach representatives to improve their performance. The regional business managers have a field-visit target of 120 coaching days per year for their sales team of about eight territory managers.

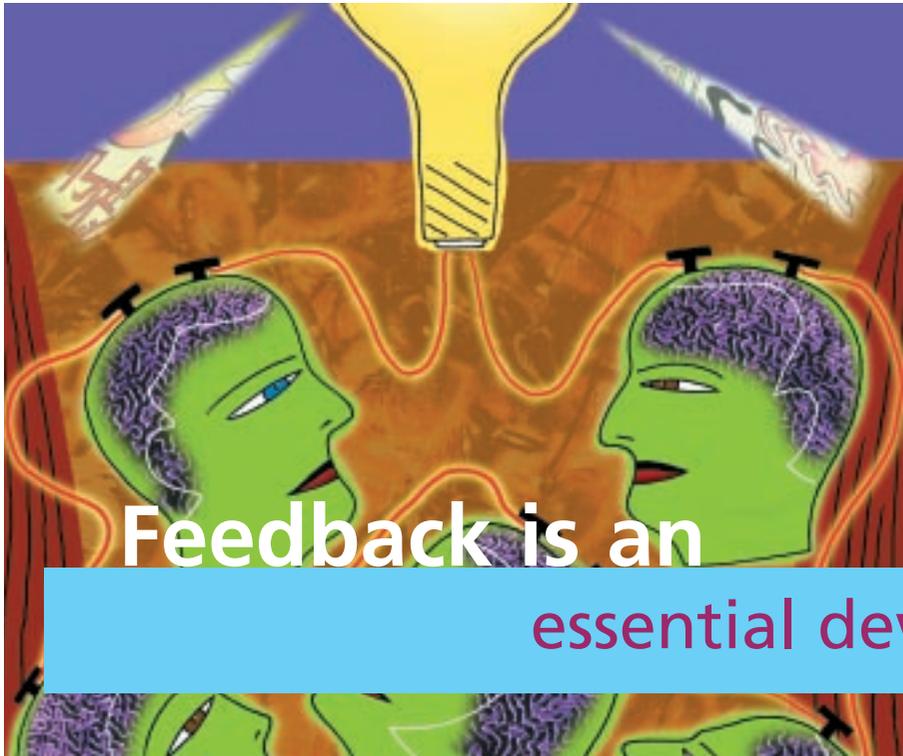
To help achieve this target, and to live up to the challenging training and development mission statement, they are giving a lot of attention to coaching. The head of training, education and development explains: *'We set very tough targets for our sales managers with regard to quality time spent coaching their teams. We highlighted that if we*

were really to improve coaching skills across the whole sales division, we needed to establish a structured and focused process for measuring and improving performance.

We also needed a process that would link directly into our recently launched bespoke online performance development programme. This programme is a competency-based system, which looks at behaviours that influence the competencies – it allows individuals to identify specific areas which need to be worked on in order to improve their skill levels and to grow and develop in the company.'

'We needed a structure around a coaching day; a framework, something more formalised,' explains one regional business manager.

'We were already using the teamindex360 feedback process in the business to help improve team performance, and we were really impressed with the results, so it was an easy decision to ask Valerie Heritage to provide us with a coaching version,' continues the head of training, education and development.



Feedback is an

essential development tool

The regional business manager went on to say:

‘We also made a decision over a year ago to create a new role within the training department; that of performance coach manager, a dedicated coach from within the business. You need someone to support you. The performance coach manager role really is crucial to success, providing you with clear direction and understanding about coaching. Feedback is so important in the initial stages.’

This sentiment was reinforced by another regional business manager:

‘Having a performance coach manager provides you with a specific resource to discuss sensitive things, helping you to put it into perspective – it is a real necessity as our line managers are often too busy or you do not feel you want to bother them. Having someone who is totally responsible for coaching means you don’t mind calling them up to ask advice.’

coachingindex360®

All too often in organisations, there is no structured, tangible approach to measuring and improving coaching skills. The common cry is ‘We’re too busy.’

Coaching meetings take time – both for those being coached and those doing the coaching. Above all else, you need to know if it is working. Many coaching initiatives fail because they have trouble transferring the initial enthusiasm out of the classroom into the day-to-day work of the manager, with the tendency to lose momentum over time.

Measuring coaching performance does not have to be a matter of gut instinct. Objective standards can be set that allow real comparisons to be drawn between individuals, teams and workplaces. The coachingindex360 feedback questionnaire covers the following:

- **Attitude.** Whether the manager is committed to learning and

development and is using coaching to achieve those goals.

- **Planning.** Whether the coaching sessions are being planned and then followed up by the manager.
- **Process.** Whether the manager is skilled in running the actual coaching sessions.
- **Relationships.** Whether the manager is open to using coaching to build stronger working relationships.

It is surprisingly simple. Participants go online to view a set of positive statements about coaching, and score the degree to which they agree with

them. Using practical, unambiguous language, these statements get to the heart of the matter – using direct language that avoids management speak and jargon. These statements need to be easily understood – so that people at all levels of an organisation can and do respond easily to them.

The role of the performance coach manager

The business unit managers (the regional business managers’ line manager) find it increasingly difficult to spend quality time coaching, owing to other work priorities. The performance coach manager takes on this role by working with the regional business managers in order to focus entirely on their coaching skills.

At the start of the relationship, the performance coach manager meets with each manager on a one-to-one basis to explain the process and agree key dates (see Figure 1).

The feedback from coaching-index360 enables the coach and coachee to be specific about the areas

that need developing. This enables the performance coach manager and the regional business manager to put together a personal development plan using the GROW model and SMART objectives, which are then included in the performance management system.

The GROW model is one of the best-known and widely used coaching models. It provides a simple yet powerful framework for navigating a route through a coaching session, as well as providing a means of finding your way when lost. It is described in a number of coaching books, including John Whitmore's excellent book *Performance Coaching*. GROW is an acronym for Goal, current Reality, Options and Will – which are seen as the four key elements of a coaching session.

Setting objectives is also important. It focuses the coach on specific aims over a period of time and can motivate them to meet the objectives set. A simple acronym used to set objectives is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely).

The performance coach manager, says:

'Many 360s fail because they are used as a whipping tool, and that is not what they are about – we have been using coachingindex360 successfully for three years, to the extent that individuals now ask to carry out another one as a barometer to how they are managing and developing their coaching skills. The performance coach manager is unbiased and able to offer an objective view on the feedback, as well as ensuring that the regional business manager gains the most from the process and is

open to working on the areas identified. It also takes away the fear factor.'

The managers' views

There is support for this process from the managers. One says:

'Surveys are very much part of our culture. What I like about coachingindex360 is that it is so easy to complete. It is very important that it is totally anonymous, as you know you are getting really honest feedback. The questions were really challenging, prompting you to think and appreciate all the things a good coach should be doing. It made me think, "How can I improve on this?" Without coachingindex360 you would have to rely on gut feel or your own ability to assess.'

Another reports:

'It has made me much more aware of the importance of follow-up and keeping things fresh with my team. Before I would set my team their individual objectives and leave them to it, checking maybe after

four to five weeks – now I send little reminders on a much more frequent and regular basis, either a text message to their mobiles or e-mail, whatever I feel is most appropriate for that individual and their development needs.'

Another reflects:

'It makes you think more about each individual in the team and makes you more flexible in style. What is going to motivate them? I have used coachingindex360 four times now. The first time I was surprised, there was a big gap between my view and my team; second time around it had narrowed. I discussed the results with my team and we cleared up any misunderstandings. The next time there were fewer misunderstandings. You have to do something with it. You need to involve the team as their development is based on yours. It's a win-win situation. The coachingindex360 process has been a significant factor in making me a better manager, and my results prove it!'

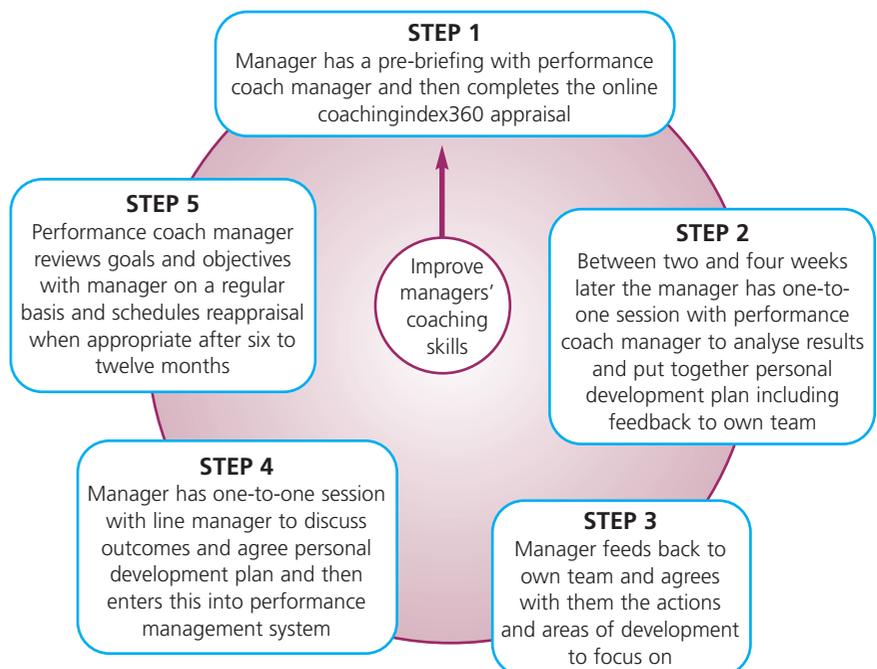


Fig. 1: The process

Feedback providers also benefit

The members of the sales teams also see benefits from this approach. One direct report said: *'It highlights what is expected of a manager, which is good for new people to the team to see as it helped identify areas for them. The confidentiality aspect is very good. One-to-ones wouldn't necessarily come out with some of the issues; it does not put you on the spot. Misunderstandings can be sorted out as it allows people to open up; it really makes you think about your relationship with your manager. Areas for improvement were clearly identifiable.'*

Another said:

'We had our grievances as a team and as individuals; coachingindex360 gave us the forum to raise these, avoiding confrontation. It gave us a vehicle in a constructive and positive way and it came through loud and clear. If we hadn't had this 360 we would have had to go to a more senior member of the team as we would not have felt able to tell our manager ourselves. I would not want to jeopardise my career – I was too new to the team. We "chilled him out", he became a much more relaxed manager.'

'It provides the team with clear clarification – we discussed what he could do for us and vice versa,' said one direct report.

'It also provides an excellent opportunity to discuss things on a formal basis as a team and on an individual basis. It allows you to say how you really feel without any repercussions,' another commented.

Several direct reports commented that it would help them to become good managers as they were now

aware of all the skills that were necessary.

Results so far

We have looked at the results over a two-year period for 14 regional business managers who were the first to use coachingindex360 with the support of the performance coach manager.

The first time around (2002), the score was very impressive, with an average well above the index360 database average. The results for the same group the second time around (2003) showed a 2 per cent improvement in performance overall, indicating a sustained high level of performance, and demonstrating their commitment to maintaining and improving their coaching skills with the help of the performance coach manager. In addition, knowing they would repeat the process in 12 months' time kept them focused.

One area in particular – that of 'Intervenes appropriately during a sales call' showed the highest increase, of nearly 15 per cent.

This area had the lowest score originally and was highlighted as a key development area. As mentioned earlier, these managers have to complete 120 coaching days a year. These days primarily take place during sales calls, in which the whole issue of intervention is important in order to achieve the right balance

– by nature there is always pressure on the coach to intervene to help 'make the sale'. Therefore an increase in this skill is very significant and important to improving the skills and overall performance of the coachee.

The second largest increases were around 5 per cent for two areas: 'Makes time to prepare for each coaching session', demonstrating an increased commitment to the importance of each coaching session; and 'Does not ask too many questions, asks them at the right time', supporting the improvement in intervention skills in the sales/coaching meetings.

Conclusions

The head of training, education and development explained: *'The results so far are excellent and reinforce our belief that we have the highest quality managers in the industry. We are continuing our commitment to developing our managers' coaching skills and during 2004 we are planning to roll coachingindex360 out to all our managers at head office. We are also planning to launch a Coaching Academy, which will be available for all managers within Johnson & Johnson.'*

There is a clear indication that this approach is working and that significant improvements can be made in a relatively short period of time if a tangible and structured process is adopted with the support of a dedicated coach.

Valerie Heritage may be contacted at The Communication Challenge Ltd.

- Telephone: +44 (0) 116 2596896
- E-mail: val@communicationchallenge.co.uk
- Website: www.communicationchallenge.co.uk