

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Coaching skills - special edition 2009

This is a special edition of *Coaching skills*, compiling all the previous issues that focused on the different EMCC core competencies, in one document. This and a selection of earlier issues of *Coaching skills* can be found and downloaded from our home page www.metoda.se/godbitar.

Lena Börjeson,
Management Consultant CMC and author, Metoda

Table of contents

	Page
What competencies are needed?	1
Self-awareness	3
Changing attitudes	4
Self-management	5
Contracting	6
Managing the process	7
Setting goals and planning	8
Evaluation - necessary for growth	9
Questioning	10
Listening skills	11
Feedback	
– another core competence in coaching	12
Language skills	13

For further information about the EMCC see www.emccouncil.org

What competencies are needed?

The EMCC Competence Framework is produced from evidence based research and is one of the main issues when applying and assessing if an organisation can qualify for an EQA. The 47 competencies are grouped under four main headings:

1. Who we are
2. Our skills and knowledge
3. How we coach and mentor
4. How we manage the process.

Competencies for good coaching/mentoring has been studied, and recommendations have been made, based on major research where evidence of progress has played an important part.

EMCC, which stands for The European Mentoring and Coaching Council, is an organisation founded to develop the profession. The aim of the organisation is to promote good practice and the expectation of good practice in the field across Europe.

Competence mapping

In UK, where EMCC started, there has been intensive research to establish good competencies. After research and also after thorough analysis by researchers and senior specialists in the field, the competencies have been described to be 47, and among these there are 11 so called core competencies that are basic, also for getting an EQA, an award in the field, as a training organisation. The core competencies should be included and described for all levels of coaching and mentoring programmes, according to the recommendations of EMCC.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

The 11 core competencies according to EMCC

- Self-awareness
- Beliefs and attitudes
- Self-management
- Contracting
- Managing the process
- Goal setting and action planning
- Evaluating
- Questioning
- Listening
- Feedback
- Use of language

These and the other competencies are described in more detail on the EMCC website.

Seminars for members and others

Lise Lewis and Marina Dieck, two of the professional coaches who have been working with the competence mapping and the framework has held seminars on the competence framework and the European quality award in coaching, the EQA. Among researchers behind the Competence Framework you will find David Clutterbuck and David Megginson. For information on the International Conference, see www.emccouncil.org or www.emcc-sweden.se. There are many more interesting names giving seminars and workshops, both within research but also practical skills training.

From the EMCC website you can get more information on what competencies that make coaching training professional. If you work as a coach/mentor yourself, if you are a manager who want to be more professional in coaching others or if you buy consultancy service – or if you belong to a professional training organisation, it is interesting for you to get to know the European Standard

and the EQA. Even if you perhaps do not aim at applying for an EQA award, it is interesting to discuss matters of quality in a growing profession and how quality standards can help your organisation and you, to do the job better.

ICF – another organisation who present competencies needed for professional work

Similar standards on competencies have been made by ICF. They also have eleven core competencies in their standard. There are many similarities between the two, see for instance www.icf.com and compare for yourself. So far, EMCC does not accredit individual coaches but training organisations. ICF accredits individuals, and within EMCC this is being discussed as a future project.

To date, two Swedish companies, Humanova and Life & Career, have qualified for and received the European Quality Award (EQA). As the quality prize gets recognised in Europe more organisations will follow. Several UK organisations have already qualified and earned an EQA. A higher standard will be good for everyone - both coaches and coachees will benefit by raising the quality in approach and methods within the field.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Self-awareness

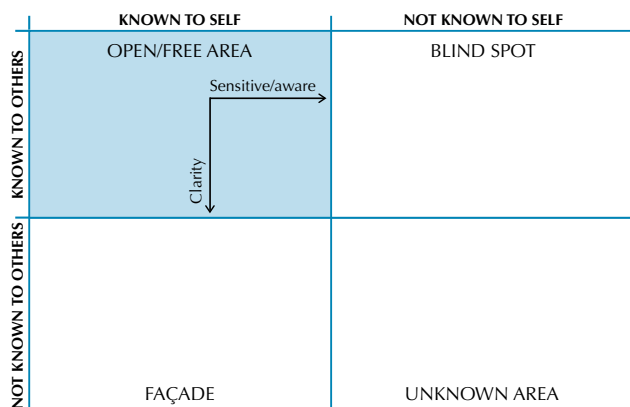
Self – yes we mean you!

Self is a word with many meanings and as mentioned in previous issues of *Coaching skills*, it can be analysed in many ways. Spontaneously you know what it means and if you add on the word *awareness* it is apparent that you as a coach who want to be aware of your surroundings, needs feedback to be a good coach and to make the coaching process both safe and inspiring for the coachee.

Are you aware of how others see you? It might be easier to think about this question if you reflect on someone you know well. Is she or he aware of what others think and feel? Often we neglect to check and there might therefore be a lot of unnecessary misunderstandings.

The Johari window describes awareness

Johari is a famous psychological model that characterize ways of communicating. The model was developed in the fifties by *Joseph Luft* and "*Harry*" *Ingham*, the name *Johari* is an amalgamation of their first names. The model shows how openness between people can increase when we are both distinct and perceptive, and how it diminishes when we are not. If I am open to opinions, feelings and feedback from others, and if I am clear and tell people my needs, I in return give others a better opportunity to get to know me.



The blind spot is what I don't know about myself, but what others know about me.

The façade consists of what I know about myself but what others don't know. If you hide much from yourself, the façade covers a big area. The unknown area consists of what I don't know about myself and what others do not know about myself.

The model can also be used to discuss communicative styles, see source below.

Important for a coach

If you want to develop your coaching skills, then being distinct and also open and perceptive to views from friends, family and others is essential. You will not grow without feedback and your view of "your self" will differ too much from what others feel and think about you. More feedback, both received and provided, improve your capability in distinguishing between "you and me" and helps you grow personally.

Four short ways of improving self-awareness:

1. Ask your friends for more feedback.
2. Try to give more feedback and develop your skills in giving and receiving feedback. Remember that feedback is also about giving praise and appreciation – not only criticism. Give someone a rose today!
3. Use some time after each coaching session to reflect. Do a PMI, i.e. write down what was good (plus), what could have been done better, and what can be developed in future.
4. Do follow-ups regularly with your coachee. You will improve!

Source

Luft, J. And Ingham H (1955) The Johari window, a graphic model of interpersonal awareness. Proceedings of the western training laboratory, Los Angeles, UCLA

Wikipedia, "Joharifönstret"

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Changing attitudes

Within the EMCC Competence Framework under the heading *Who we are*, you will find the subheading *Beliefs and attitudes* and specified within this section the different aspects such as belief in others, valuing diversity and having empathy. Under the same subheading you will also find the definition of "self", i.e. self-belief, self-awareness, self-management and integrity.

Belief in others and having a positive attitude towards people is indeed important for everyone but especially for a coach/mentor that is training within different organisations. In your everyday life you would more than likely have met a person who have made a difference to you by his or her way of being good at relating to others and being positive. Beliefs and attitudes and the competence framework are large and complex subjects so we will focus on changing attitudes this time. How do you deal with negative attitudes?

Carpe diem – seize the day

To change is no easy task. You might not even notice that you have a negative attitude and therefore won't see the need to change. You have a negative outlook on life, and a negative way to express yourself e.g. "I can't do it, we have never done it that way in our family" etc. It is often easier to notice that someone else has a negative attitude.

Working with your attitude is a must for a coach. A coach should have a positive approach, look forward and not accept "impossible" but instead ask questions like "how can this be solved?" or "what do you need to...?"

The patterns of our belief systems are often responsible for our negative attitude. Our belief systems are formed through experiencing both good and bad situations in life. Behind these patterns lurk negative feelings that we don't reflect on. Feelings of hurt, of being scared, loosing confidence, and other unprocessed feelings. The patterns we

repeat often stand for some kind of need we have. It might be time to change some of those needs, and a dialogue with a good coach can help you focus on what *can* be done rather than what can't be done.

Do you want to change? Try this exercise

Take a separate piece of paper or use the lines below and write five or six sentences, starting each sentence with *I must...*

I must _____

When you have finished, read through what you have written. Can the word "must" mean "wrong", either something was wrong in the past, is wrong now and will be wrong in the future? Take a moment to reflect on this then replace the word "must" with the word "can" instead. This will enable you to see the problem or behaviour in another light. Follow up by asking some positive coaching questions like "why didn't you..?" or "what do you need in order to do this?"

This exercise is nice to do with a friend, colleague or partner. You will have lots to talk about.

The exercise have been developed by the famous healer *Louise L Hay*, and can be found in her very interesting self help book, *You can heal your life*, Hay House Inc, www.hayhouse.com.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Self-management

To manage – what?

If you look up 'self-management' in the English section of the web-based dictionary, Nationalencyklopedin (www.ne.se), it will tell you the word does not exist – yet.

However, the phrase 'to manage' exists in the dictionary and is described to mean 'be able to handle', 'to succeed in something,' 'to cope with things' etc. If you add the complex word 'self' to the word 'manage' you can quote the famous C G Jung, who described 'self' as every mans core and as something whole (almost holy you could say). The ego, part of your identity in the external world, is just a part of the 'self', and is far removed from the meaning of the word today, where in everyday language it sometimes stands for being alone. To manage yourself seem to be an essential skill in order to be able to help others.

To like yourself

Several authors and specialist in the field of personal development and relationship management, stress the importance of being able to like yourself enough, as this skill is essential in order to have good relationships with others. That means liking and striving to integrate both your good and bad sides, those to be proud of and those you are still working on to improve. When it comes to coaching it seems fundamental for the coach or mentor to be able to 'know thyself', not just your own competencies, what you can do and what you should not get in to, but also that you can have a good relationship with yourself and that you can distinguish what is 'you' and what could be another persons problem or need. The other persons needs should be in focus, not for instance, your own need of being a 'good helper'.

No time for yourself?

A coach who doesn't have enough time for themselves, to reflect, relax, regain spirit, get

inspired or have time to meet friends, will eventually discover that too much time have been spent on others, thereby neglecting the need for taking care of yourself – and all sides of you – the spiritual, the physical and the emotional side. And perhaps also just having fun or just relaxing. Many managers I have met, in particular women, stresses that this is an important need that they have neglected, i.e. the need to make time for themselves, not just for others. Traditionally a woman puts her family's needs before herself, and perhaps not fulfilling her own needs at all. To make other choices can feel shameful.

To say no sometimes

To plan taking care of yourself and giving yourself priority is an essential skill behind self-management and to be able to make choices that include your own well-being. Colleagues and friends can be a good help in encouraging you to make better decisions, as they often notice your needs better than you.

Is it easier to deal with practical rather than emotional aspects?

You may find it easier to reassess practical rather than emotional aspect of self-management, i.e. to be able to handle your days efficiently and professionally. Sometimes, even if you work alone as a coach, it can be nice to look over your 'coaching logistics', and improve your routines.

A nice and simple example of a new daily routine to consider could be to make time for and get inspiration from discussions with colleagues.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Contracting

The contract

The word contract can make you think of red tape and bundles of paper. However, in coaching it means an agreement on focus, goals and plan of action before the coaching begins. It is also an agreement on practical matters i.e. how, when and where the coaching should take place. Once the contract is agreed and the coaching process begins it is important to continue to evaluate the contract during the coaching process and to adjust it if necessary.

A lot has been written about the importance of the contract procedure, as it is one of the most essential steps in the early phase of the coaching process. If the coaching process starts before a contract and plan of action has been agreed and before you have established a relationship it is easy to lose track and focus. This is also true in mentoring although that process is somewhat different; the coaching process is more focused and intense and takes place during a shorter period of time.

The contract is about building trust and a relationship

In coaching, the contract is about having a dialogue and to discuss what the coaching should cover, and about how this will be achieved. It is also about reaching an agreement between the coach and the coachee to ensure both parties have a clear understanding of their roles in the process.

As is true of contracts and agreements in everyday life, goals and circumstances may also change during the coaching process. It is therefore very important to continue to assess and evaluate the contract, the changes required might even surprise you and your coachee. Being a good coach means being able to handle sometime complex meetings and unique circumstances and job situations, as every person and situation is different. There are no standard ways of making progress and the contract and plan of action may have to be revisited and amended continually.

Coaching often means giving support to develop the coachee's own decision processes and

increasing their competence, also helping them change old patterns of behaviour.

What should a contract process cover?

The contract should contain a framework outlining the overall process. Use a similar approach to that used in project planning i.e. evaluate the limitations, possible problems and possibilities and use those in your framework. Assess the coachee; how do they behave in their working environment, how do they interact with you, what are their limitations and how can you best work together. Agree on practicalities and include in the contract such details as how often you should meet, for how long and where. Also discuss and agree on the learning, evaluation and feedback process.

A quick guide

- Make a checklist, together, of topics and issues you should discuss.
- Talk about it openly, be curious about each other.
- Agree on focus and goals.
- Be open and frank from the start, give each other feedback.
- Decide on how and when to meet – don't leave too long intervals between the meetings as this may mean you have to start over every time you see each other.
- Agree on and write a short list of essential rules. Keep the list short and stick to what you have agreed. Continue to evaluate and adjust the list throughout the coaching process if necessary.

You will know your contract has been established when you feel you have built a relationship of trust, your goals have been set and a plan of action agreed. You will feel inspired in the same way you do when you set out on a well-planned journey.

How to choose a coach

There are many coaches to choose from, however it is always a good idea to first consider those coaches who have been specially trained and taken part in EQA (European quality award) programmes. At the moment there are very few in Sweden but hopefully that will soon change.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Managing the process

Understanding it is a process and not a project

It is important for a coach or mentor to understand that the work they do is about making a journey together with another person, or a group. Even when the process starts off well with planning, discussing goals and roles, making a contract etc, unforeseeable issues can come up during the coaching process. Goals can change and new issues can turn up affecting the relationship between the coach and coachee. As you know, important things also take time and cannot be forced along too quickly.

Understanding it is a mutual learning experience

New managers can sometimes have difficulties understanding that managing people is not a clinical process and that good leadership is about a continuous dialogue. This is also true in coaching and its imperative that the coach understand that it is not a mechanical process where you only establish and work through goals, evaluate and complete with a neat and tidy finish. Being flexible, attentive and to have the ability to check and reconcile is vital. Also, to be able to assess, develop and improve. It is essential to steer clear of 'traditional' management in coaching and mentoring.

How is our relationship working?

This is an important question that the coach should ask either at, or after, each meeting. Follow up regularly and evaluate your work, take time to reflect. Make the evaluation a natural process. As a coach you should be prepared to be influenced by the coachee, but you must also be able to set boundaries.

The above may seem straight forward, but are there difficulties as well?

To stick to the above points should be straight forward, but it can be difficult. For example, it can sometimes be difficult to 'put your foot down'. It can also be hard to avoid steering the

process too much in order to reach certain goals and therefore going too fast. Because of these and other difficulties that may turn up it is good for a coach to have a supervisor for guidance. It is essential but can be difficult to get an in-depth understanding of the person you coach. If decisions are made without a comprehensive understanding it can lead to poor results and to only superficial changes being achieved.

Know yourself

It is important to assess the situation and ensure you are qualified before you agree to coach someone. Many of the potential risks or possible difficulties can be discussed before the coaching starts. The candidate might have needs and requirements you are not able to meet, for example they may be looking for a therapist rather than a coach. It is important to be clear on what you can and can't do from the start and to agree on what you will discuss and work through when the coaching begins. It is vital to be clear on roles and responsibilities. Some coaches even make a formal contract listing terms and conditions. This might be something for you to consider?

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Setting goals and planning

Go for goals!

Are you tired of goals? Try again! Being good at formulating and setting goals can help you a long way towards your own personal efficiency and also be very helpful for any person you coach. How else can you measure your career development?

Goal setting methods

Simple goal setting methods can be just as good as complex ones. One simple method is the "six-goals method". Take a piece of paper and start by writing the heading "in six months from now (date) I will have reached the following goals" then proceed to list your six goals, it should not take long to complete. Focus on these goals and keep them close at hand and you will be more efficient in your daily life.

This method of setting goals can also be used as a question in coaching, for example "what do you want to be better at in a year from now?"

Do you know what you want?

Sometimes goal setting can be tricky, for example, if the person you are coaching doesn't know what he or she wants. If you don't desire or want anything it is difficult to set any goals. If this is the case try instead to focus on any issues and problems to see if they can be turned into goals instead. You can also discuss and brainstorm ideas on alternative avenues the person you are coaching can take and thereby widen their perspectives.

Watzlawick, a therapist and author well known for his goal-oriented approach who as well as seeking creative solutions stressed the need of being very clear and particular when formulating goals.

Turning a problem into a goal

This is an example from Watzlawick's written work.

Problem: A young couple came to him because they had trouble with one of the pairs parents who came to visit them too often. The couple had tried

everything they could think of to stop the parents coming around so often – but nothing had worked, they kept turning up, often unexpectedly.

Watzlawick helped the couple approaching the problem in a different way by encouraging them to try and articulate what their parents would say if the problem had already been solved. After some coaching the couple formulated it like this:

Goal i.e. the problem is solved when our parents tell us: "We realize that we have come to visit you too often. From now on we will wait for you to call and invite us before we come around."

A clear enough goal! The next step was to work out a plan of action on how to make the parents understand the situation.

Using a good and concrete language in formulating goals that needs to be expressed better is important for success.

Action planning

If you have done a good job formulating your goals, half the job is done towards reaching your goals or dreams. If not, you have to do some more action planning. An important step in action planning is to discuss first steps and priorities. A good method is also to try and formulate goals that can then be broken down further step by step:

In order to receive this goal (in the future)

- Describe the steps you take today
- Describe the steps you take the following week
- Describe the steps.....next month, etc.

The important step psychologically is that you translate your goals for yourself in more detail and visualize what can be done. That will help a lot towards starting taking action and making things better for yourself.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Evaluation – necessary for growth

Professional people evaluate

We are often good at starting ventures without being able to evaluate and measure our progress as we go along. Evaluation is essential in order to carry out a professional coaching job.

The other day for example I got a call from my web host. Initially I thought they were calling to try and sell me something but as it turned out that was not the case. They were simply following up with their customers to make sure they were happy with their services, and to ensure they had their customers correct address details. We had a short conversation and I appreciated the follow up and told them so.

In coaching, evaluation and follow up is necessary. How else can a coach ensure that they are working towards the same goals as the person they are coaching? How else can they make sure they don't overlook any opportunities to reach those goals if they don't ask for feedback?

Evaluation of coaching work is a matter of structure as well as monitoring how the joint process and the relationship between coach and coachee develops. Evaluation can easily be built into every meeting by ending each session with an informal chat asking for feedback through questions like; did this meeting help you? Did we get any closer towards reaching future goals?

Ask for feedback

It is important to build and maintain a good relationship throughout the coaching process. Therefore it is important to follow up after every meeting by asking for feedback and evaluating the response. Was the meeting helpful? How did it make you feel? What decisions have you made as a result? Is there anything you think we should have done differently?

Use the goals

Use the goals and objectives you pointed out at the beginning of the process (if you did) in your follow up. Do you think you are closer to reaching your objective(s)? How far have you come? What stops you getting there now? You may find that you have to modify how you formulate your goals which might not be a bad thing. The goals can be reached in a way that neither of you thought of and as a result the plans have to change.

Use the PMI method

Edward de Bono, famous author and creator, is the person behind the PMI method amongst other things. PMI is a great method to use for the follow up and evaluation process in coaching. P stands for PLUS, M stands for MINUS and I stands for INTERESTING. The coachee can be asked to list all the "pluses" with their job, their role, the coaching so far – or any relevant subject. "Minuses" are noted in the same way. When you have completed a PMI it is interesting to evaluate the various themes, like what pluses do you want to improve or do more of?

Ask for ideas

Everybody has ideas on improvement. Lack of ideas is not always the problem behind inadequate follow up. More commonly it is just the *lack of* follow up. If you ask a coachee for ideas on improvements, you will become a much better coach. If the follow up implies your way of coaching could improve, learn to appreciate that too, it helps you to develop new competencies and become a better guide the next time.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Questioning

Socrates is famous for it

Socrates is famous for his individual way of asking questions in order to develop competence from within the person and to learn from that. He also focused on learning as a dialogue.

To be a good coach or mentor, you need to know how to ask the right questions and to have good communication skills. The "Socratic method" is a systematic way of asking questions.

Living or dead?

There is currently an on-going debate in Sweden focusing on a reality TV-program where 'ordinary' school teachers have been replaced by top performing teachers in an attempt to improve the performance of a poor performing school class to become one of the top three performers in Sweden. The teacher in chemistry started his lesson by bringing in a dead mouse and a live crayfish, asking: "what is living and what is dead?" The whole class got motivated – this was different.

What is the art of asking good questions?

Some of our readers might have memories of old fashioned teachers who used to follow the book by the letter and formulate their questions accordingly. E.g. "what happened on the Mediterranean Sea during the Middle Ages?" The correct answer was: "swarmed with boats", as the published sentence was: "During the Middle Ages the Mediterranean Sea swarmed with boats". That is not a good way to formulate a question.

Positive focus is essential for empowerment

Good questioning is using positive, inspiring questions like:

- Can you tell me more about that? It seems interesting...
- What are your experiences from that? Please tell me more, it is fascinating..
- What would you like to happen to make your job more fun?

Good questions start with *what* or *how*. Some people recommend not to ask *why*, as this can provoke a defensive attitude and start a negative spiral.

"Future orientation" is recommended

Example: one year from now, what would you like to know/have learnt?"

Try to avoid getting stuck to deep into conversations on the problem, which perhaps won't lead anywhere. Think ahead – and focus when you coach others, on "how to solve things", like "what would be a simple solution?" Or – "what would be the most wild solution you can come up with?"

Inspiring people to think creatively and let go of ballast from the past can produce wonderful results. "It can't be done", or "I can't do that" – can be met with: "what would you need to take a first step?"

Be more lazy as a coach – ask more questions!

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Listening skills

In every day life we are confronted with a variety of listening events, from casual, off-handed remarks to circumstances where, if you do not listen and learn, your well-being or your life may be at stake. Perhaps you can agree with me what a pleasure it is to meet a qualified listener, whether this person is a professional coach or therapist or if it is just a person who has developed their listening skills, thereby knowing how to take part in a good dialogue and how to inspire other people.

Have you heard the saying "there is no coincidence that a manager has two ears and one mouth"? The saying can be traced all the way back to the ancient Greeks, where it was published in a teaching guide on good leadership skills for young boys. It is still true – you can learn a lot by listening more and train your listening skills.

Charles Page – retired lawyer on listening

Lawyers have to listen a lot to understand people and cases they meet during their career. Charles Page is a retired lawyer, living in Caramel, USA. He recently published a book called *Listen... it will change your life* (ISBN 1-877809-96-9). It is a practical and also helpful book on how to get more out of communication. Page has had his own company, has worked with law cases and also as a manager. He has also served as a member of the boards of several organizations.

Some of his short techniques for becoming a better listener are described below.

1. Reflect on the need to listen to somebody – ask yourself: is this a listening event?

Stop for a second and ask yourself two questions:

- Do I have the time to listen right now?
- Am I distracted by other things that demand my immediate attention?

2. Decide that you want to listen and show it to the other person.

If you are distracted and don't have the time, inform the other person and decide on when you will resume the talk again. Otherwise - get ready to listen, decide that you are going to listen. Be sensitive to the mood of the other person. Your way of showing that you want to listen is important. Listening is also a relation skill.

3. Relax and focus is another recommendation at the start of the listening process. You can't be relaxed and focused all the time – life is too complicated, but you can train yourself to relax. This is important, especially if the other person is upset.

4. Identify listening barriers

Try to identify listening barriers and ask if there is another time that would be more suitable. Common listening barriers are:

- distraction, desire etc to do something else
- anxiety, embarrassment, impatience or nervousness
- attitudes, assumptions and prejudices
- lack of interest, ignorance or apathy
- preparing to respond
- too busy or don't want to listen.

Don't blame anyone for these barriers, but try to manage them. Be aware of your own listening barriers, and get rid of them. Relax and focus.

5. If needed, make summaries and use questions to show that you understand the other person or the problem discussed, or check that you are "speaking the same language". What do the other person need?

You can read more about listening skills in Pages book, and at www.parkplace-publications.com, or in a book by another author on communication, *Förtroendefullt samarbete*, by Tamm and Luyet or *"Kommunikation för coacher"*, see www.metoda.se.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Feedback – another core competence in coaching

Feedback skills

If the skill to give feedback was practiced as often as it was talked about it would be good! In my experience as a management trainer and coach, feedback is still a much too seldom practiced skill in many organisations. I often ask business professionals at all levels if they get enough feedback. The answer is always NO, most people want both kinds of feedback, i.e. they want to know when they have done a good job and they want to know if the job can be done better. People care and want to know – it is important for both the individual and for the working environment. It creates trust, which is essential for good team work.

The skill to give and receive more feedback in everyday life is essential for the successful manager– and also for developing a good and creative job climate.

Don't do this when you give feedback

- Don't generalise – don't use words like "people", "always" etc.
- Don't be a "know it all".
- Don't use a negative tone.
- Don't criticize one person in front of a group.
- Don't push anybody.

Example

Henry has written a report that is not very well structured. It is difficult to understand what he really wants to say.

- *Don't say:* this report is really badly structured. This won't help Henry, it will make him feel miserable and angry.
- Ask some questions instead about Henry's intentions and how he himself could improve it.

- Don't intellectualize too much in the conversation.
- Don't stop giving feedback, just because you are afraid of hurting the person. As Dag Hammarskiöld wrote in one of his books, it is less painful to receive constructive feedback on how to improve than to realise you could have handled a situation better had you been told in time.

Give feedback this way instead:

- Be as direct as you can if the timing is right.
- Describe, be concrete and constructive.
- Be specific.
- Try to be helpful.
- Keep the feedback as a process dialogue – don't make it a one way show. Remember – it takes two to tango!

Receiving feedback is also important. When someone gives you a compliment, say thank you. And if someone comes with a negative comment, you can also say thank you and ask for more information. Be more active with feedback, and you will become a better manager.

Recommended books on the subject are; John Whitmore (one of the founders of EMCC), "Nya coaching handboken", Brain Books publishers or Stephani König, "Motivera genom Feedback", Liber Executive Series.

Metoda™ Coaching skills

- Special edition 2009

Editor: Lena Börjeson, Management Consultant CMC, Metoda, lb@metoda.se ISSN nr 1652-7712

Language skills

It is apparent when reading today's newspapers or watching TV that the correct use of language is a deteriorating skill. Less people realise the importance of good language and communication skills. It is imperative to have good communication and language skills in order to be a good leader or coach. It is necessary to be able to express yourself and to develop those skills. This can be done in many ways, but here follows a few suggestions.

Developing your language skills

Ask for feedback. It is important to understand how you are being perceived by others and to ensure you communicate clearly and concisely. By asking for and acting on feedback from those you communicate with on a regular basis you will be able to improve your communication skills. This is especially important when you work in a global environment and with people from different cultures.

Be prepared. Ensure you understand and are aware of common cross-cultural issues by doing research and talking to people who have experience.

For instance, in Japan when giving away a gift it is not only important to make sure that it is the right type of gift but also that the present is wrapped correctly and presented in a certain way. Not being aware of such and other customs can make it very difficult and frustrating to work together and create unfortunate misunderstandings.

Read more poetry and novels

A beautiful way of developing your language is to read more classical novels. It sounds boring, but it can be really creative. By reading a well-written novel you will get inspired by the language of an expert.

Be flexible but careful in your use of language

Today we meet and communicate with people from various cultures on a daily basis. Therefore it is even more important to be clear in our communication and to understand how our behaviour is perceived by others. For instance, body language and use of metaphors are two things that can mean very different things in different cultures. Make sure, in a nice way, you are being understood, be aware of reactions and ask questions if you are worried you might offend.

Be very careful how you express yourself in all written correspondence. It is very easy to misunderstand when you don't see each other and get "automatic feedback".

Can you be yourself?

It can be difficult to "be yourself" when you are interacting with different cultures. It takes time to absorb and understand different cultures, to get a feeling for what you talk about and what you do not talk about. A medical doctor in Turkey talks in a firm way, most managers in Finland gladly "point with their hand" to underline what they want done, in Sweden that might cause offence. Also, in Sweden we can sometimes overdo discussing an issue in order to avoid conflicts and therefore might never come to a decision.

Be careful when you use metaphors

Some years ago I was interviewing some managers in Jordan, in order to set up a management training program there. I used the metaphor "building bridges" and people looked at me bewildered. Then I realised that water was a scarcity in Jordan. I had forgotten, but therefore, to use the words bridge and water was not something that had a positive meaning. Another time, I was talking with a group of deaf people and I had tried to learn to draw the phrase 'nice to see you again.' Unfortunately I had drawn it up-side-down, and accidentally changed the meaning to 'I detest to meet you' instead. Seeing their horrified expressions was feedback for life, a good lesson for me!

A joke can be so different

Read and do research about the culture you are about to interact with. Try to integrate as much as you can. There is a saying "when in Rome, do as the Romans do," and that is true in many aspects. In some cultures, for instance the English, there is a special quick way to use jokes. I have noticed at several conferences I have attended that people from other countries can be offended by this. This is not intended by the English speakers at the events, but they are so used to their own language and to work within that frame – they don't notice there is a problem.

Being flexible, looking for instant feedback and adjusting to others needs is crucial in good communication. Why not read some poetry from another country today, before going to sleep? African poetry, Russian poetry or a fairytale from old Yugoslavia?