



## Performance and Training

### Carol Wilson What is coaching?

*first experienced coaching during a decade working at board level with 'natural' coach, Sir Richard Branson, and has since worked with many corporations on embedding their own coaching cultures. In this article she explains what coaching is and how it works.*

A sea of confusion surrounds the term 'coaching' in business today. The expression has not even made its way into dictionaries yet, where 'coach' is defined simply as 'tutor' and yet there is nothing new about the practice other than its name. Socrates was the earliest identified exponent, when he wrote:

"I cannot teach anybody anything - I can only make them think".

This quote relates to the underlying principle of coaching, termed *self-directed learning*, sometimes described as *self-managed learning*.

### What coaching does

Coaching helps people to communicate more clearly and in a way that is simply more comfortable. In this modern world of change – the seemingly constant buying, selling and merging of global corporations – and virtuality – teams working together while spread over different parts of the country, or indeed the world – communication can be the oil in the wheels or the rust that stops them from turning.

### What coaching managers do

A coaching manager has to practise in two areas: the *doing* and the *being*. In terms of *doing*, managers can learn new ways of listening, questioning and conducting conversations, tools which will improve their own performance and that of their teams. The *being* is about wanting to listen and ask questions in the first place; owning a set of spanners does not make you a mechanic, and learning a set of coaching tools will not make you an effective coach.

True coaching managers have a genuine desire to support their staff, colleagues and bosses; they want to see people grow, develop, be fulfilled and enjoy the time they spend at work. Coaching managers look at *what people are*, rather than *what they are not*, in the sense that they search for the best in people and try to build on their strengths, rather than dwelling on their weaknesses.

This type of management makes people feel valuable, talented and appreciated, which in turn boosts their energy, loyalty and commitment to the company's aims.

### Where did coaching come from?

Back in the 1970s a Harvard sports coach called Timothy Gallwey realised that if he left the court for a period, his coachees' techniques improved faster than when he was there to instruct them. He named this *self directed learning* and devised a series of questions which would enable this process, rather than stifle it. These form the basis of the questioning techniques we use in coaching today.

Within a decade, Tim's work was discovered by an English baronet and ex-racing driver, Sir John Whitmore, who opened a tennis and ski school to develop the techniques. Before long, John's team was invited by corporations to inject a day of tennis coaching, using these new principles, into their management training courses, to help managers embrace the principles of *self directed learning*. These one day sessions were given the name *performance coaching* to distinguish them from the rest of the training. *Performance coaching* is now often referred to as *executive coaching* or simply *coaching*. It embraces the coaching principles applied to many different areas, such as *career coaching, life coaching, financial coaching, leadership coaching* et al.

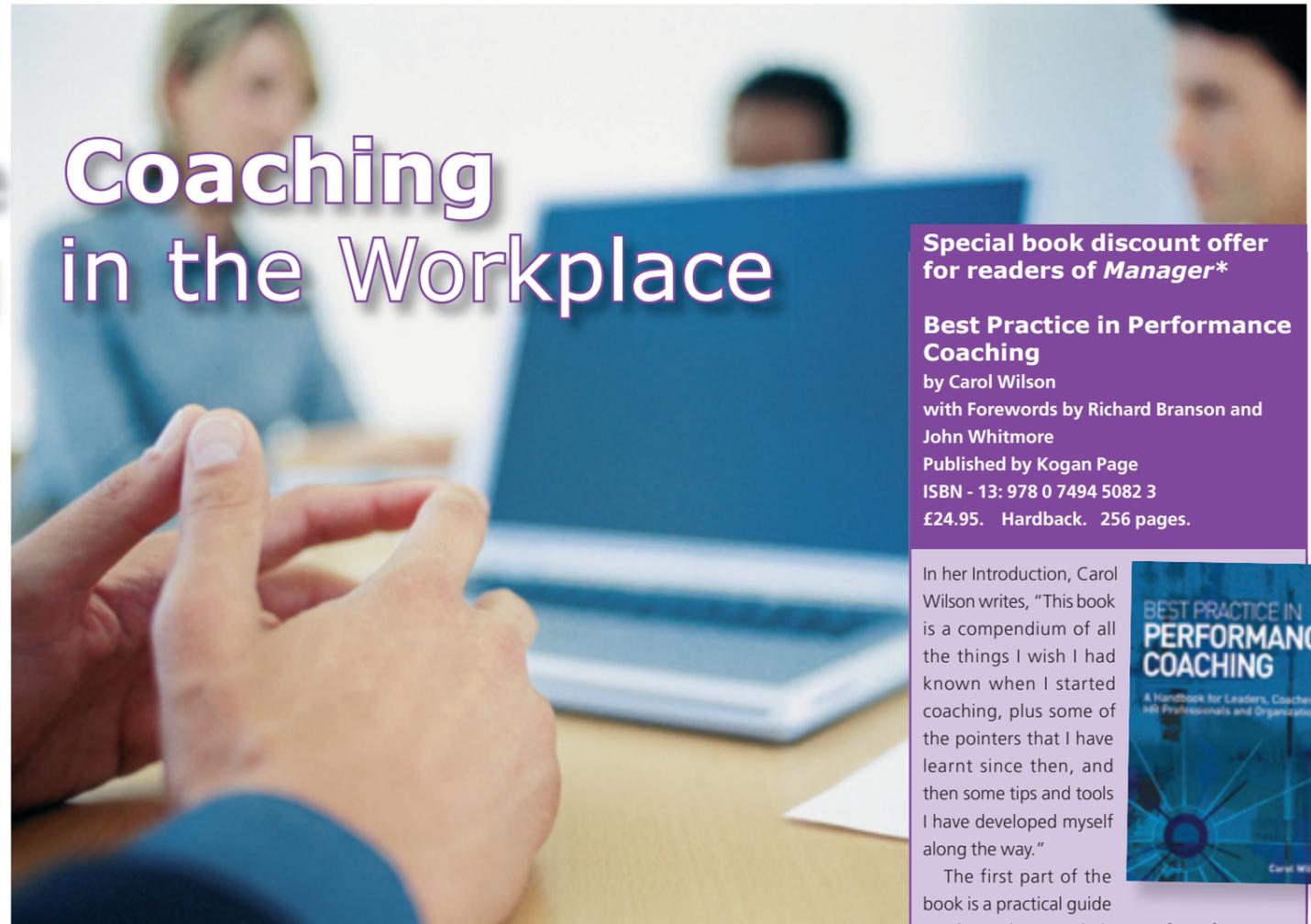
### What is a coaching culture?

Some definitive words relevant to a coaching culture might be: *trust, energy, support, fun, blame-free, learning, confidence, risk taking, growing, belief in other people*. Some notable coaching cultures in the world today are Virgin, IKEA and Brazilian global giant Semco. I worked for a decade at board level with Sir Richard Branson in the first, designed a programme to reinforce the existing coaching culture in the second and have read the books written by Ricardo Semler, the founder of the third.

Each of these organisations energetically embraces the *self directed learning* principle, encouraging staff to think and take responsibility for their own decisions and actions. Two other principles are essential for the first to thrive: building self belief and a blame free (or learning) culture. These are intertwined:

- mistakes are treated as learning opportunities,
- people are allowed the space to experiment and learn how to get the best out of themselves,
- staff are given recognition, in the form of praise or material

## Coaching in the Workplace



Special book discount offer for readers of *Manager\**

### Best Practice in Performance Coaching

by Carol Wilson  
with Forewords by Richard Branson and John Whitmore  
Published by Kogan Page  
ISBN - 13: 978 0 7494 5082 3  
£24.95. Hardback. 256 pages.

In her Introduction, Carol Wilson writes, "This book is a compendium of all the things I wish I had known when I started coaching, plus some of the pointers that I have learnt since then, and then some tips and tools I have developed myself along the way."

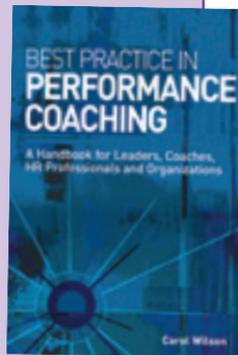
The first part of the book is a practical guide to the 'what' and 'how' of performance coaching. The second part digs down into detail and specifics about coaching models and actual case histories. There are some exercises at the end of each chapter for those who wish to practice the skills.

The two last chapters provide a list of 'coaching tools', the most popular methods apart from coaching, used by coaches and organisations today, and several case histories to illustrate coaching in practice. These are written by coaches from different parts of the world and range from coaching in the NHS and the BBC to coaching in the USA, Australia and Japan.

Some of the topics covered in the book are:

- Coaching techniques,
- Coaching models,
- Coaching in organisations,
- Training as a coach,
- Running a professional coaching practice, and
- How to create a coaching culture at work

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International speaker, writer and broadcaster Carol Wilson is Managing Director of Performance Coach Training Ltd and Head of Accreditation at the Association for Coaching. She experienced the value of a coaching culture at first hand while working at board level with Sir Richard Branson in the formative decade of Virgin. Carol was nominated for the AC Awards 'Influence in Coaching' and 'Impact in Coaching' and is the author of 'Best Practice in Performance Coaching' (Kogan Page 2007) featuring Forewords by Sir John Whitmore and Sir Richard Branson.

She presents at conferences and workshops and consults on creating coaching cultures in organisations including CLM Olympic Delivery partner, IKEA, NCR, Dept for Education and Skills, Royal Bank of Scotland, Cranfield University School of Management, Sky News, Channel 4, The Discovery Channel and Brunel University Business School.

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benefits, whenever they have earned it.

These three elements, in operation together, create an energy and synergy that will take any organisation to great heights. Here in the UK we have witnessed the rapid growth of Virgin and IKEA over the last 30 years, and Semco continues to grow at 30% - 40% every year. All three feature their coaching values strongly on their websites\* (although none use the word *coaching*, demonstrating that the term is not a new fad, but describes something that is inherent in people and is able to be developed).

One feature that all three have in common is that each is privately-owned by a visionary entrepreneur. So is it possible for a corporation controlled by shareholders to create a coaching culture too?

The happy answer to this is that a coaching culture is not an all or nothing state; some organisations may have one in the Seattle division and an autocracy in London, depending on who is in charge. Or there may be isolated pockets of coaching teams dotted throughout the world and unrecognised as such. It does not matter, because coaching spreads like a happy virus; it feels so good and works so well that people want more. So, if you are not in a position to pilot your entire organisation towards becoming a

coaching culture, do not give up; just work with the people around you and institute whatever measures you can, whether this means organising coach training for your department or simply working on the way you personally communicate with your people, your peers and your bosses. All coaching initiatives, whether personal or company wide, start a process of change which carries a momentum of its own.

\*[www.virgin.com](http://www.virgin.com), [www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com),  
[www.semco.locaweb.com.br](http://www.semco.locaweb.com.br).

### Recommended Reading

- *Coaching For Performance* by Sir John Whitmore (Brealey 2002)
- *Best Practice in Performance Coaching: a Handbook for Leaders, HR Professionals, Coaches and Organizations* by Carol Wilson (Kogan Page 2007)
- *The Inner Game of Tennis* by Timothy Gallwey (Random House 1997)
- *Screw It Let's Do It* by Sir Richard Branson (Virgin 2007)
- *Maverick* by Ricardo Semler (Random House 2001)