ARMY360
Coaching Newsletter

MSAF Coaching: Developing the Coaching Relationship

Coaching is not the transfer of knowledge from a teacher or mentor to a learner, nor is it meant to be a rigid interaction where a subordinate receives prescriptive instruction. Instead, the strong MSAF coaching relationship is supportive, guiding and supporting the leader in developing solutions and strategies for improvement. When a leader gets "stuck" or is uncertain how to improve or develop, a coach offers suggestions to facilitate the process.

The MSAF coaching model (see Figure 1 below) is designed to coach and develop competent leaders who engage in new behaviors that reflect and implement the organization's values, mission, and direction. The duration and focus of an MSAF coaching engagement often varies, but the fundamentals (components) of the coaching process remain the same. In this newsletter, we will focus on two of the eight MSAF components that support the development of a strong coaching relationship: **Building Rapport and Gathering Information.**

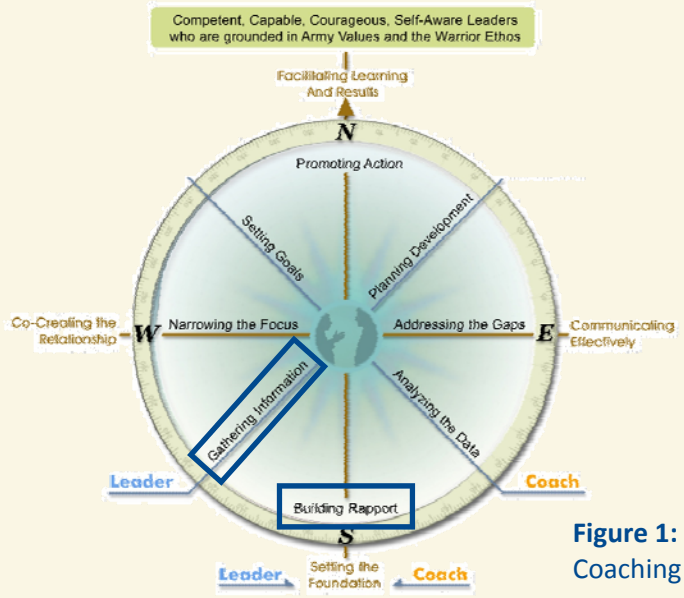

Figure 1: The MSAF Coaching Model

Building Rapport is found at "South" on the model above. Central to an effective coaching relationship is a strong and positive rapport between the leader and the coach. Strong rapport is demonstrated by how easily the leader confides in and accepts guidance and feedback from the coach. The coach builds rapport by clarifying the reasons for coaching, reinforcing confidentiality, describing roles, and clearly setting the context. **Gathering information** is organic to building rapport, because in order to set the context of the coaching session, the coach must gain a firm understanding of the leader's background, situation, the events leading up to the assessment, and expectations.

In this Issue

MSAF Coaching: Developing the Coaching Relationship
- A discussion of the foundational MSAF components to building strong coaching relationships: Building Rapport and Gathering Information

How to Effectively Build Rapport in Virtual Coaching
- A description on how to build rapport effectively in a virtual environment and a list of techniques to ensure a strong virtual coaching relationship.

Ask the Expert: Developing a Strong Virtual Coaching Relationship
- A challenge coming from an MSAF coach posed to our coaching experts and a narrative case study followed by the challenges and techniques used by the coach to develop the virtual coaching relationship.

Virtual Coaching: Tips for an Effective Coaching Session
- A list of suggestions and tips for a strong virtual coaching session.

How to Effectively Build Rapport in Virtual Coaching

Building rapport virtually can be challenging even for the most experienced coaches. Note that while we refer to coaches and coaching, building rapport virtually applies to mentoring relationships, as well. Many coaches (and mentors) build rapport by seeing and meeting individuals and observing the leader's learning style. For these coaches, a lack of visual contact can be difficult. Technology and logistics also can get in the way of virtual coaching as both the coach and the leader must ensure they have the appropriate equipment.

During the past few months, we received several questions from our MSAF coaches about how to build a strong virtual coaching relationship. These questions will be explored in greater detail on pages 3 and 4 of this newsletter.

Virtual Coaching Techniques

As a coach, in order to develop a strong coaching relationship during a virtual coaching session, you should apply the following ground rules:

1. **Prepare** for each virtual coaching session. Strong preparation can go a long way in letting the leader know that you understand his or her challenges. Remove all distractions from your surroundings as well.
2. **Build rapport** by asking introductory questions and discussing the coaching process. By asking the leader to define session expectations or goals, the coach can structure the session to meet the leader's needs. Then throughout the session, the coach can ask how well the coaching discussion is meeting expectations, and if needed, shift the focus of the session. Also, find out the current challenges and issues the leader is facing so the coaching discussion can assist the leader to effectively apply the most relevant feedback to address the job-related and/or other issues.
3. **Gather information** by being attuned to the leader's needs, asking questions, and summarizing frequently. This *helps the coach* to assess the leader's understanding of the feedback, his or her moods and emotions, the meaning of voice variations, and coaching progress and benefit and *helps the leader* to build a relationship with an individual who he/she knows is listening and understanding what he/she has to say.

Virtual Coaching Technological Considerations

When conducting a virtual coaching engagement, it is important to have a discussion with the leader on the most effective communication medium to ensure that both parties have the necessary equipment. For some leaders, this may be via phone. Other leaders may prefer to chat using a web camera or other desktop sharing programs, such as Live Meeting. Before conducting the coaching engagement, make sure to troubleshoot the logistics and set-up of the session.

Learn More: The Virtual Improvement Center (VIC)

The Virtual Improvement Center (VIC) is available as a resource for leader development on the MSAF website. The VIC offers numerous developmental activities including readings, exercises, and simulations organized by the Core Leader Competencies to make it easy to search by developmental need. This is an excellent resource for leaders to develop knowledge and skills. Coaches should be familiar with the VIC in order to appropriately recommend it to leaders.

Ask the Expert: Developing a Strong Virtual Coaching Relationship

One coach asked: *"I find that it can be very difficult to build rapport when coaching virtually. What are some techniques or strategies that can be used to overcome these challenges?"*

In the case study below, a coach uses techniques to build a strong virtual relationship with a new leader.

Mr. Allen is about to have his first virtual coaching meeting with MAJ Jones. Thirty minutes before the coaching session is scheduled to begin, Mr. Allen stops what he is doing and reviews *FM 6*-22, and the *Leader Development Improvement* (LDI) *Guide* so that he can make suggestions for new behaviors that are aligned with Army competencies. Before beginning the session, Mr. Allen turns off his phone and computer.

Mr. Allen begins his coaching session by asking MAJ Jones to confirm that he has privacy. Once MAJ Jones confirms his privacy, Mr. Allen then describes the challenges and benefits to coaching over the telephone. Mr. Allen goes on to describe his role as a guide—not a teacher. He confirms that MAJ Jones agrees with these parameters.

Mr. Allen then asks MAJ Jones to describe his current physical setting. As MAJ Jones goes into detail, Mr. Allen closes his eyes and tries to visualize the Major in his current context. He then asks MAJ Jones to describe how he believes his peers perceive him, the challenges he faces in his development, what's been working, and what's not been working. Mr. Allen listens carefully to MAJ Jones, noting verbal cues that suggest an emotion like raising one's voice, or change in pitch or tone. Mr. Allen then matches tone of the Major. Mr. Allen also takes note of meaningful silences, and nonverbal cues like breathing, in addition to what the Major is actually saying. Before asking further questions, Mr. Allen summarizes the key points MAJ Jones brought up.

Although Mr. Allen is tempted to set the direction of the coaching, he recognizes that it will have more impact if he allows the Major to come up with his own conclusions.

Virtual Coaching Challenges and Techniques

Challenge	Technique from Case Study
Prepare for Each Virtual Coaching Session Third parties or surroundings can more easily interrupt a virtual session.	Mr. Allen sets aside 30 minutes before the coaching session to review *FM 6-22* and the *Leader Development Improvement Guide.* He also removes distractions (e.g., phone, computer).
Build Rapport by Asking Introductory Questions Unlike other forms of counseling, coaching rapport must be built quickly. Virtual coaching is even more difficult because the typical social norms for building a face-to-face relationship are missing.	Mr. Allen asks MAJ Jones to describe his current physical setting, ensuring that it is private, and then visualizes the setting to help him to ask appropriate questions. Mr. Allen also carefully defines his role as a coach and the coaching process.
Focus Your Listening Pay attention to tone, pitch, cadence, tempo, and the overall flow of the conversation.	Mr. Allen notes verbal cues that suggest an emotion like change in tone. He then matches the Major's tone to foster a sense of connection and empathy.
Recognize that Silence or Longer Pauses Are Normal It is natural to want to fill up silences, but pauses can be beneficial to the leader.	Mr. Allen recognizes that nonverbal cues such as meaningful silences and nonverbal cues are important to the conversation in addition to what MAJ Jones is actually saying.
Attune to the Leader's Needs Use powerful questions and summarize frequently.	Mr. Allen summarizes the key points MAJ Jones brought up before asking further questions and ensures there is a break in the conversation for him to interject. Mr. Allen's questions are insightful and powerful to reflect active listening.

Virtual Coaching: Tips for an Effective Coaching Session

To ensure a strong virtual coaching session, MSAF coaches should use the following suggestions and tips. The following suggestions and tips are organized sequentially from before a coach picks up the telephone throughout the entire session. ***Remember**, coaching confidentiality is very important. Review Federal guidelines and discuss what will be documented with the leader.

✓ Before you start the telephone session

- Get into the coaching mindset: Take 10 to 15 minutes before the call to look through your notes and feedback reports.
- Minimize possible distractions by turning off electronic devices (e.g., phone, computer).
- Send a reminder of the call with needed information (e.g., telephone number).

✓ During the call

- Greet the leader calmly and ask how he/she has been doing. Remind the leader that everything said during the session is confidential.
- Confirm that the leader is in a place where they can talk freely.
- Establish context by asking the leader to describe where they are: location, seating arrangement, computers, music, etc. If you have a feeling the leader's place is not adequate, suggest a change.
- Imagine the leader, visualize him/her, and listen to words and intonation.
- Develop empathy - reflective questioning and mirroring are tools you should master.
- Try to determine the leader's learning style: visual, kinesthetic, or auditory.
- Adapt language to the leader's communication style.
- Build trust throughout the session.
- Check the agreements and goals the leader wants to achieve.
- Stick to the agreed times and leave time to wrap up the session smoothly.

✓ Ending the session

- Thank the leader for an open, honest discussion.
- Encourage the leader to continue development.
- Ask leader if he/she would like to continue coaching.

✓ After the session (optional and subject to Federal guidelines)

- If applicable, create a system to keep in touch with the leader by email, telephone, chat, etc.
- Record notes of the session, if appropriate.
- Write a session summary noting leader issues, learning, and actions.
- Ask the leader to send you an email with the agreements and goals.

Ask the Expert: What are some strategies for dealing with a leader who is resistant to feedback?

As a challenge to our readers, submit your feedback to the above posed question and your answer may be featured in our next coaching newsletter. Send an email with your response to Heidi Keller-Glaze, Ph.D. at hkeller-glaze@icfi.com .While all responses may not be featured in the next coaching newsletter, we will try to highlight as many of your ideas as possible. Please also indicate whether you would like to remain anonymous in your email.

Participation in Army MSAF is voluntary, and is available to Army officers, NCOs, warrant officers, and Army civilians across the Active, Guard, and Reserve components. Especially opportune moments for MSAF including post-deployment, before and after serving in a command position, and after a mission rehearsal exercise (MRE). With your help, we can increase Army leader self-awareness and develop better, stronger leaders.

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