

Moving from Strategy through Execution: Why Coaching Matters Now More Than Ever



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It's not easy inspiring and engaging employees in today's fast-paced business environment. Whether wearing the leader hat or the manager hat, managers and leaders certainly have plenty of competing objectives. Competition is global and intense; the pressure to deliver results is never-ending and traditional product and business cycles are compressed more than ever before. In the past, strategic planning aimed at 10 to 15 years out and short-term planning was a five-year plan. Today, five years out is considered "long-term" planning, while short-term planning is focused on getting through tomorrow. Gone are the days when companies could carve out a market position and defend it from competitors indefinitely. Today's technology advantage can easily vanish tomorrow.

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Technology plays the dual role of both contributor to the problem and potential solution. We have more technological tools and data at our disposal than ever before, yet technology advances have distracted employees and created an expectation that managers be available 24/7. Connectivity has made data accessible, inexpensive, fast, and easy, while databases now give everyone instant access to everything. As a result, many employees are drowning in data and management must compete for their attention.

To better understand how well managers understand the connection between business strategy and results, BTS and TalentKeepers asked people managers at 417 companies their opinions on a variety of issues related to business strategy, execution, and results in the TalentKeepers 2011 Employee Engagement and Retention Survey. According to that research, almost half (48%) of respondents agreed that their organizations have identified the behavioral capabilities required by leaders and managers to achieve business goals/results. However, only about a third (32%) said that their companies allocated the necessary resources to develop the leadership capabilities, highlighting a potential disconnect.

In addition, that same research points out that a majority of leaders and managers (58%) are committed to company strategy and even more middle managers (71%) understand how what they do contributes to the organization's strategy. That understanding drops with front-line managers, who typically end up owning most of the business goals and objectives. Executives and senior leaders surveyed felt that less than half (42%) of front-line managers in their organizations effectively connect employees (the work they do) in their team/work group to the overarching business strategy.

The research highlights the difference between understanding business strategy and connecting it with day-to-day work on the job. Understanding and committing to a strategy is only step one to achieving desired business results. As a middle or front-line manager, getting your team to connect what they do day-to-day with the strategy is much more difficult. It is no longer enough to simply communicate business strategy to front-line managers and expect them to deliver results. Today's managers and leaders must not only communicate, but also inspire. Getting employees' attention and inspiring them to focus and execute on key initiatives is the new management challenge.

The Role of Coaching in Today's Competitive Environment

The bottom line is that in today's business environment, long-term success is dependent on strong leadership and management for the successful and continuous execution of changing business strategy. It's all about becoming a nimble organization capable of anticipating change and making the right course corrections. . . quickly. As much as we rely on technology to do our jobs today, it's still *people* that need to innovate and people who must execute on business strategies for the organization to succeed. To fully execute strategies and anticipate change, people need the focus, tools, and processes to rise above the data noise to understand the story the data tells, in order to deliver what's important to the success of the business. That takes support—often provided in the form of coaching.



Coaching is the single most important tool for accelerating results in today's fast-paced global marketplace. Executed well, coaching helps move people from one focus, operating standard, and corporate initiative to the next. Without coaching, moving employees from one paradigm to the next takes more time—time that companies can no longer afford.

Here's the rub: as pressures to perform with more speed have grown, managers tend to fall back on more traditional forms of coaching—based mostly on one-way/push communication and telling people how to solve their problems. The challenge is that this type of coaching—when overplayed—is no longer effective in motivating today's

knowledge-based employees. Management development programs that address "problem solving" with employees by "telling them what to do" can trigger defensiveness. Use of role-plays in a training course can feel disconnected from real work, and some traditional coaching programs never get to what really matters when it comes to successfully managing change. In a nutshell, some coaching training programs can feel painfully disconnected from employees' everyday jobs, which in turn can feel far removed from the overall business results.

This white paper provides an overview of a new type of coaching model rooted in both inspiration and execution and designed to develop nimble managers and organizations. While several studies have already shown the positive impact of coaching on business results, the purpose of this white paper is to explain why a *results-based* coaching model is even more important now than ever. In addition, it provides a framework through which BTS, the global leader in strategy implementation, approaches coaching at leading organizations and how we help them unlock, inspire, and engage the power of the individuals being coached.

Tapping Into What Really Matters to Employees

Perhaps not surprisingly, in the face of rapid change and mounting pressure, many companies tend to pump up traditional command and control models, telling employees what to do, providing financial incentives for attaining goals, and cutting anything that doesn't obviously contribute to the bottom line. The problem is that traditional command and control models are no longer effective in motivating innovation-driven organizations. It turns out that real innovation comes from elements beyond the traditional carrot-and-stick approach.

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According to Daniel Pink, author of *Drive: What Motivates People*, there is a critical disconnect between what science has discovered about human motivation and the compensation and management models in place in corporations today. Citing study after study, Pink states that human beings are motivated by three core elements:

- 1.) Autonomy – people want control over their lives and their destinies at work.
- 2.) Mastery – people have an innate drive for self-improvement. We all want to improve our skills and become experts at what we do.
- 3.) Purpose – people want to be part of something important and larger than themselves.

Pink's innovative work builds upon the earlier work of Timothy Gallwey, author of *The Inner Game of Work*, and Sir John Whitmore, author of the coaching classic *Coaching for Performance: Growing People, Performance and Purpose*. In his seminal work, Gallwey created a coaching process that steers clear of giving advice or controlling performance and instead facilitates thinking and self-observation for improved learning and skill development.

Working closely with corporations, Gallwey observed that the typical approach to performance improvement through command and control models actually gets in the way of learning. It turns out that the more we try to control performance outcomes, the more we actually contribute to worse performance. He created a model for the workplace in which learning, enjoyment, and performance work together to create an ideal work state. When one is out of balance, they all suffer.



He states, “When either the learning or the enjoyment side is ignored, performance will suffer in the long run. When it does, management feels threatened and pushes even harder for performance. Learning and enjoyment diminish even further. A cycle ensues that prevents performance from ever reaching its potential.”

This is exactly why we created a new model based on the work of Pink, Gallwey, and Whitmore, as well as some of the recent research of Paul J. Zak, professor of Economics and Department Chair and founding Director of the Center for Neuroeconomics Studies at Claremont Graduate University.

The Power of Asking the Right Questions

Real thinking and inspiration are spurred by asking guided questions rather than through telling and directing; guided questions help the person being coached arrive at the heart of the matter at hand and draw their own conclusions. This self-observation and reflection helps internalize insights and accelerate behavioral change. Yet in addition to the science behind why this works, there is an art in the asking of the questions. Managers cannot simply ask an endless set of questions. This swings the pendulum the other way and can also create defensiveness.

The key lies in asking the right questions and to do this effectively takes practice and skill. While seemingly fresh in today's command and control business environment, this questioning process has roots in the ancient world with Socrates and the Socratic Method. Coaching has been around for centuries, and our own experience in working with companies has shown that effective coaching is driven by asking the right questions and getting employee buy-in versus providing answers and direction.

By asking the right questions, coaching can create a structured process to help the person being coached develop the ideas, perceptions, approaches, and plans that they need to deploy to increase performance. In the COACHING FOR EXECUTION program, BTS introduces participants to a unique questioning approach that assists them in mastering this important skill.

What Makes BTS's Coaching Approach Different?

The BTS coaching approach taps into the coachee's need for autonomy, mastery, and understanding purpose (as postulated by Dan Pink). In COACHING FOR EXECUTION, BTS combines The ROPE Model and the power of asking high-impact questions to drive higher performance. The ROPE Model provides the coach and the coachee a structured process to follow, while high-impact questions help them identify new and innovative ways to generate improved results.

The ROPE process helps coach and coachee remain focused and efficient during the coaching process by keeping to the following road map:



To start the COACHING FOR EXECUTION experience, the ROPE process begins with a focus on *Results*. What is the organization, business unit, team, or person being coached (the coachee) trying to achieve, and why? Starting with Results is important because it gets the coach and coachee working collaboratively and focused on agreed-upon measures for results. Too many times, coaching approaches start with the *problems* needing to be addressed, which can make people feel defensive and under attack. Beginning with the end in mind (Results) creates a different psychological state from which the coach and coachee can work together to create an action plan. Considerable new literature from the area of neuroscience (by such popular authors as David Rock and academic researchers such as Paul Zak) corroborate the power in shifting mental models to first focus on the positive desirable outcomes.



Once the coach and coachee confer and agree upon desired results, the conversation next addresses *Opportunities*. What opportunities exist to generate the specified results? Focusing on Opportunities next in the sequence continues the creation of a positive mental state. In coaching situations focused on closing a performance gap, focusing on Opportunities as the next step avoids the pitfalls of creating a defensive and sensitive environment, which can trigger the hard-wired “fight-or-flight” response.

Only after agreeing upon the desired Results and Opportunities do we start identifying the *Problems* that are standing in the way of achieving the desired results. By this time, the Problems feel less personally threatening to those being coached and more like obstacles that can be overcome. Problems can include business challenges, policies/practices, mindsets, and risks.

Finally, the ROPE Process concludes with a focus on *Execution*, which addresses what the coachee will do to accomplish the agreed-upon results. Execution includes creating a timeline, identifying resources, specifying action steps and delineating accountabilities. As a result, the ROPE model combined with the use of high-impact questions creates higher levels of accountability among those being coached. After going through the process, coachees have participated and collaborated in identifying the results, opportunities, problems, and execution steps to achieve the desired results. The approach is equally applicable in coaching conversations focused on developmental growth as it is in closing a performance gap.

The concentrated focus on Execution, combined with high-impact questions designed to generate ownership and innovation, help the individual being coached to align their goals and measures, mindset, and skills with that of the organization. Today’s economic climate requires nimble managers and the accelerated achievement of results and today’s successful coaching programs need to start with results and end on exactly what needs to be done to create the desired impact. Accountability is thus established as part of the repeatable process.

Anchoring Role-Plays in Reality

One way of accelerating results is to make training sessions as realistic as possible. COACHING FOR EXECUTION focuses participants on real situations that they are challenged with in their day-to-day jobs. This roots the coaching

experience in reality and helps coachees connect the dots between what they are learning and how it can be practically applied in their jobs. This direct connection of *Real-Plays* to actual work makes coaching immediately relevant to the coachee and means that coaching then becomes a way to build the necessary skills to improve their job performance. The closer the program mirrors real work activities, the higher the relevance to the coachee, which translates into the higher usage of new skills on the job.

Helping Managers Unlock the Power of Their People

Companies that succeed in today's competitive environment will do so based on the leadership, insights, and skills of their people. Those organizations that can create direct links between strategy and execution will have a competitive advantage over those who do not. The COACHING FOR EXECUTION process helps people identify the results to achieve and be achieved as well as the key metrics associated with them. As a result, it closes the loop between desired results and execution, providing the coachee with both a road map and a score card to measure if they did the things they said that they were going to do and a means of measuring the impact of the coaching process. COACHING FOR EXECUTION creates a powerful experience for leaders and sends them back into their roles with a plan, a coaching process, and an expanded ability to execute for success today and tomorrow.

About BTS:

BTS is the world leader in customized business simulations and other discovery learning solutions that enable leading corporations to change, grow and succeed. We partner with our clients to develop the mindset and capabilities that their people need to accelerate change and to improve business results.

BTS adds value for our Global Fortune 1000 clients through three practice areas: Strategic Alignment & Business Acumen, Leadership & Management, and Sales. We have strong capability in Operational Excellence & Project Management and offer an innovative Engage for Change process. BTS is a public company listed on the Swedish Stock Exchange and trades under the symbol BTS B.

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