Why Learn About Coaching?

- Software is interdependent work, constantly changing
  - The more skills you have to to work with others, the more you’ll succeed
  - The more flexibility you have in “helping” other people, the more valuable you are
- Coaching in the workplace can be different from typical sports-based coaching
  - Software projects are mostly intangible, so hearing things such as “do this” or “do that” lack context
- Caveat: I don’t know how many activities we will finish
Why Do You Want to Coach?

- Reasons I’ve heard from managers:
  - Build capacity in the group
  - Build relationships
  - Build trust
- Non-managers’ reasons
  - Build relationships
  - Make it easier to work with others

Before You Coach…

- Are you ready to coach?
- Is coaching the best learning opportunity?
- Does the other person want coaching in this area?
- Does the other person want coaching from you?
- Are you open to other approaches?
- Are you ready to encourage rather than evaluate?
- Are you ready to end the coaching when it no longer fits for either of you?
The Coachee’s Perspective

- Agreement from both people that a coaching relationship is what you both want and need
- Coaching is a short-term approach to help people see possibilities
  - Coaching does not take the place of feedback
  - Coaching is in addition to feedback
  - Coaching helps people build their own capacity

- Feedback is information given in the present about an event in the (recent) past with the hope of influencing the future
- Mentoring is offering a helping ear and a sounding board
- Teaching is training

Some Coaching Approaches

- Frame the problem
- Provide context
- Help coachee see the big picture
- Help coachee see the steps
- Generate more options
- Provide real-time feedback
- Ask questions
- Demonstrate
- Review
- Provide information
- Listen
- Catch people doing something right
- Catch people before they go too far down the wrong path
- Bring an expert
- Learn together
- Teach
Coaching Offers Options

- Helps a person increase capability with your support
- Support is the operative word

Generate Options: Rule of Three

- Every problem has at least three viable solutions. If you can’t think of three options, you don’t understand the problem
  - Supplies choices
  - Breaks people out of logjam thinking
  - Review implications of each option
    - Options have consequences/results
Once the Coachee Sees More Options

- Develop a SMART goal
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Attainable
  - Relevant
  - Time-boxed
- Make the goal something positive, not something a dead dog could do
- Develop an action plan
  - Small do-able steps

Avoid Inflicting Help

- Exceptions
  - As a manager (or if it’s part of your job to help a team succeed) you have to coach even if someone isn’t asking for help
  - When safety is an issue
  - These may be feedback, and not coaching
Meta-Coaching

- Remember when generating options:
  - It’s the coachee’s job to generate options
  - It’s the coach’s job to facilitate generating options
- Remember when reviewing action items:
  - Avoid “don’t” language
  - Focus on what to do
- Consider both people’s personalities, especially around energy and decision-making
  - Introvert/Extravert
  - Perceiving/Judging

Coaching “Steps”

- Ask questions about the problem
- Ask what success means
- Consider the variety of coaching tools
- Help person build an action plan
- Monitor the plan

• In the real world, you would check in with the other person to help monitor the changed behavior. We can’t do that here today.
Activity

• Everyone, take one card. Write a problem on a card that "you'd" like coaching about. If you have more than one problem, separate them or take more cards. Some possibilities I've seen in the past are:
  – When to refactor
  – Architecture decisions
  – How to rank requirements
  – Decision-making in a group
  – When to leave a job
• Put your card in front of you.

Activity

• Organize yourselves into groups of three: Coach, coachee, observer
  – Coachee, take one of your cards
  – Coach
    • Ask questions
    • Help your coachee develop alternatives
    • Discuss consequences/results
    • Develop a SMART goal
    • Develop an action plan
  – Observer: watch and listen; you may need to take notes
  – We'll debrief between sessions
Debrief Questions

• These are the minimal questions I’d like you to answer:
  – From Observer: What did you see and hear from the coach, from the coachee?
  – From Coachee: What worked best for you?
  – From Coach: where were you surprised by the coachee? Frustrated?
  – Meta-question for your group: What else do you want to mention?

Qualities of Coaches

• Patient
• Able to help generate options
• Use active listening
• What about these qualities:
  – Technical expertise
  – Experience with the problem
Activity

• Everyone, take one card. Write a problem on a card that you need to coach someone else on. One problem to a card. Some examples I’ve seen before:
  – Taking a manager/technical lead off the critical path
  – Someone’s behavior is career-limiting
  – How to give someone else feedback
  – How to estimate
• Put your cards in front of you.

Activity: More Coaching

• Organize yourselves into groups of three: Coach, coachee, observer
  – Coachee, take one of your cards
  – Coach:
    • Ask questions
    • Help your coachee develop alternatives
    • Discuss consequences
    • Develop a SMART goal
    • Develop an action plan
  – Observer: watch and listen
  – We’ll debrief between sessions
Debrief Questions

- These are the minimal questions I’d like you to answer:
  - From Observer: What did you see and hear from the coach, from the coachee?
  - From Coachee: What worked best for you?
  - From Coach: where were you surprised by the coachee? Frustrated?
  - Meta-question for your group: What else do you want to mention?

Following Up Over Time

- As a coach, you’ll follow up over time
  - To see that the behavior is changed
  - To help the coachee monitor progress on the action list
- Discussion: how long a period of time do you need to follow up with coachee post-coaching?
Activity: Meta-Coaching

- Individually, write the answers to these questions:
  - What are your particular foibles when it comes to following up?
  - What options do you have?
  - How will you know you’ve succeeded?

Activity

- In groups of two
  - Review your answers to previous questions
  - Discuss how you’ll monitor yourself
  - Ask for coaching if necessary
- We’ll debrief together
Final Debrief

- What stands out for you from these practices?
- What was challenging?
- Where did the work go smoothly?
- What does this say about the way we worked together?
- What’s one thing that would make you more effective as a coach?

Summary

- Coaching is part of what we do when we work in collaborative teams
- Practice coaching for greater results
References and Resources

- Managing Product Development blog: jrothman.com/blog/mpd
- Esther Derby’s blog: estherderby.com/weblog/blogger.html