

Coaching has become an increasingly popular way of accelerating your personal and professional development, but you wouldn't be alone if you were unsure about just what it is and whether you would benefit. This short article is based on questions people frequently ask us about coaching. We hope it addresses those questions and gives you a clear understanding of UGM's approach. It might also help you work out if a coaching program could be the right development tool for you.

What exactly is coaching?

Coaching is essentially a series of robust conversations where you explore your personal and professional goals with someone trained in practical ways of supporting you to achieve them. It usually has a quite specific focus, for example, a performance challenge you're facing right now where some extra help from someone 'in your corner' (but objective) could make all the difference. The process is non-directive, results-focused and the responsibility for taking action belongs to you, not your coach. There's often a trigger for a coaching program, for example, starting a demanding new job, where the first few months could be critical.

While an amateur might struggle alone to improve their performance, the professional gets themselves a coach!

How can coaching bridge the gap between the present and your goals?

The relationship between you and your coach typically starts with some real world data about how you're going in your job right now. This could involve looking together at information about how you're perceived (including how you see yourself) collected from a 360 degree feedback exercise. There could be a meeting with you, your coach and your manager where your role, its KPIs and your current performance are discussed to identify the outcomes you and your organization would like to see out of the coaching program. This kind of information will help you and your coach focus each meeting on developing your existing strengths, managing your weaknesses and addressing any 'fatal flaws' and other risk areas that might derail your success. Coaching is centred on bridging the gap between where you are now and where you'd like to be.

You can see from the above that, for UGM, coaching is a collaborative partnership between the coach and the coachee. If someone doesn't want to be coached, then it won't work. If there's a poor level of rapport between you and your coach, then that will undermine a successful outcome. Lastly, if a person has long standing social and personal distress, then any results-focused coaching program should be put on hold while they seek counseling or psychological help with those issues. Coaching isn't counseling.

What's UGM's approach based on?

You can be confident that your UGM coach is fully qualified, accredited and experienced. The coaching models we draw on are based on sound research in the behavioural sciences, coupled with the very latest data on how people think, solve problems and change. We also draw on our work in leadership, culture and strategy to help us be a sounding board for you, supporting you as you work out answers to the challenges you're facing. At all times, our approach is grounded in respect for you and your values. We believe that coaching can play a unique role in building the self-insight and skills that will enable you to reach your full potential.

What sort of situations can benefit from coaching support?

In thinking about our answer to this common question, we felt it would be useful if we simply opened our files and shared with you some of the quite diverse issues and motivations that our clients have brought to their executive coaching relationships with us in the last couple of years. Maybe one or more of these will resonate with you. Here's a glimpse into our files.

- *Role transition:* A competent technical expert is transitioning into a more senior role where now she will now have to engage a much wider set of stakeholders and step into a significant management challenge, with a relatively short time frame to deliver business results. She knows that just because she has excelled technically and professionally in the past, doesn't mean this step up into a pure management role will be a breeze.
 - *CEO strategic challenge:* A CEO is embarking on a new appointment where the organization needs to turn around its current poor performance and set a new course for success. The CEO can see that not only will he need to design a compelling vision, he will also need to engage people and take them on this transformational journey with him.
 - *High performing team:* A senior manager needs to find ways to raise the performance level of her very diverse team and secure their commitment. This team is facing a major change but team members are hampered by low morale, an unwillingness to take risks and unresolved conflicts, a legacy from past problems in the team.
 - *Succeeding at the top:* A talented and ambitious woman has secured a high profile role in an organization where most of the senior people are men. While she has the support of the CEO and the Board, she feels under scrutiny and is determined to succeed. There are some significant obstacles in her way and she wants a portfolio of tools that will help her step into the role, while maintaining her own authenticity and sense of self.
- *Changing course:* A senior executive finds himself at a career crossroads. The job that was once exciting now feels draining, taking its toll on his sense of well-being and even on his family life. He wants to get back in touch with his values and decide what might come next in a long career full of achievements. He feels he wants to reset his compass and find a new direction.
 - *Becoming a leader:* A group of high potential future leaders have begun a year-long development program and they need tailored, individual coaching to help them put into practice 'on the job' the new skills they are learning. Each has particular strengths but also gaps in their personal skills as managers of people and as leaders. They want to be stretched and challenged.
 - *Closing a performance gap:* A senior manager has recently had negative feedback from the CEO. It's clear that the executive will need to demonstrate some new behaviours if the CEO is to retain faith in him. The executive himself wants to stay in this organization and sees a potentially bright future for himself there. So he's motivated to do things differently but doesn't quite know where to start or how to go about it.

Did you recognize yourself in any of those situations?

Whether you're an aspiring or a current leader, we can design a coaching program to meet your needs, equipping you with the insights and skills that will help you reach your goals. Whether you want to address a skill gap, change an unhelpful behaviour, or elevate your performance – we can help you turn 'knowing' into 'doing'.

Building a 'coaching culture' in your organization

Do you have to manage in a talent-hungry market, where you would like to be able to say with confidence that a key point of difference between yourself and your competitors is your people – who they are and what they can do?

Increasingly, organizations in all sectors want to hold on to their talent. But they're aware of the number of studies showing that all too often people leave managers, not organizations and, conversely, will stay when they have a strong and positive relationship with their manager. It's simple: managers with great coaching skills produce great results and keep their people. For some this comes naturally, but for others it doesn't. Building a 'coaching culture' throughout your organization is a way of securing these positive outcomes consistently, by transforming 'how we do things round here'.

In short skills programs together with some follow-up support, managers learn ways they can motivate and influence people to achieve their best performance. They learn how to communicate effectively, reduce conflict, develop people's capabilities and manage a team. All this raises engagement levels and promotes high performance. Talk to us about how your managers can become great coaches.

The amateur v the professional ...

To close, it's worth noting that more and more people in organizations are finding out what elite athletes have known for a long time: while an amateur might struggle alone to improve their performance, the professional gets themselves a coach!