

## **ITM Coaching™ in Action: What, When, and How to Coach in Interrupt-Driven Cultures**

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"Work" is people having conversations with one another to get things done. Conversations drive innovation, change, and results. And coaching conversations, in particular, sustain the results leaders want. Mariposa Leadership, Inc. has worked in high-tech and financial services organizations for the past 10 years. In that time, we have developed and taught **ITM** (In-The-Moment) Coaching™ — a practical model that helps leaders sustain change and make results stick in fast-paced, interrupt-driven companies. People get interrupted frequently in the course of a day. This is the norm. **ITM** Coaching™ works because managers leverage the learning opportunities that present themselves and interrupt people to give feedback. Managers are leveraging a system that already exists. An effective leader looks for opportunities to coach "anytime, anywhere." This perspective flies in the face of the typical manager who says, "I just don't have enough time to coach."

### **How to Coach: Importance of the 3-Step ITM Coaching™ Model**

**ITM** Coaching™ is a simple, yet powerful approach. The skills associated with the approach form a user-friendly acronym: RAR.

- **Rapport** - Get into behavioral rapport quickly
- **Assess** - Understand the situation
- **Re-frame** - Help others solve the problem with a new insight or action

As simple as these three steps may sound, usually one of the steps is left out. Here are three examples of the same scenario in which one of the crucial steps of RAR is omitted. Also included is the impact to the situation and possible remedies using RAR.

**Scenario:** An individual is in the middle of a crisis situation and runs to his/her boss to get coached on how to solve the issue.

- *Situation omitting "Rapport": Despite the explicit contract the boss has to coach the individual on business issues, it does not appear on the surface that the boss cares about the issue because he is distracted by his email.* Remedy: Relationships are built over time; behavioral rapport must take place at any given moment and in every conversation. The boss needs to not only make eye contact, he needs to match the direct report's body language. For example, if the direct report is sitting down and leaning back in his chair, then the coach should do the same. This will signal to the direct report that the coach is truly "with" him/her.
- *Situation omitting "Assess": The boss doesn't fully understand the situation and jumps in immediately to tell the individual what to do and is off target on a couple of attempts.* Remedy: To effectively assess, the coach must slow down to listen and ask relevant questions. Once the coach fully understands the situation, then it's appropriate to offer a relevant response.
- *Situation omitting "Re-frame": The boss asks lots of questions but doesn't close the conversation and allow the opportunity for the direct report to take a next action step. And, in the end, the conversation takes longer than necessary.* Remedy: It is important to get to the "gem" that is going to help the direct report re-frame the problem. A "re-frame" is a new way of thinking about an issue that leads a direct report to a new action, behavior, or perspective about the situation. The direct report must walk away with a "distinction" — something tangible that they can do differently.

With the hectic and fast-paced nature of organizations, we find the simplicity of the **ITM Coaching™** model something that managers can easily refer to and practice. Leaving out any one of the 3 crucial steps will significantly minimize the investment already made in having the conversation in the first place. By remembering to incorporate all three practices, you are increasing the likelihood of success and return on your time and energy invested.

## **What to Coach: Examples of How to Help Others Change Words, Behaviors, and Perspectives**

The following is a vignette that demonstrates how using the tenets of **ITM Coaching™** (coaching anytime, anywhere and skills of RAR) creates positive change for others. These changes are at three levels: words, behaviors, and perspectives.

Mary is the manager of a product development team at a software company. She made a lateral move into the organization only two months ago to manage a team of 25 individuals that included three project managers, 20 software developers, and two contractors. She did her due diligence of running weekly staff meetings and bi-weekly half hour 1-1's with her direct reports.

Mary noticed in her staff meetings that one of her project managers, Robert, had a tendency to get visibly upset during the meetings. In front of the entire team, he would raise his voice at certain team members and tell them how they were not contributing at the level he was expecting. Mary usually talked to Robert afterwards to provide feedback. She used these opportunities to quickly coach him on how to manage the situation next time or to go back to the other person to work it out offline. Mary saw some changes over time based on the input she provided here and there. Her input varied based on the situation and what she noticed he needed at that moment. Most of the time, her five-minute coaching gave Robert new behaviors he could try; in addition, Mary was looking for more sustained change.

Mary decided that she was going to leverage her 1-1's with Robert to coach him more deeply on all three levels coaching — words, behaviors, and perspectives. After all, Robert already used their 1-1's to complain about how others were not performing. Mary decided to bring up the patterns she noticed and coach to that. She would still continue to use the hallway conversations and staff meetings to coach him in-the-moment to reinforce the learning and practices, but the 1-1 afforded her more than five minutes for deeper conversations.

## **Change Words**

In the next 1-1, sure enough, Robert brought up a situation with a coworker that he was unhappy about, "Mark never updates me on his project status so I don't have a clear idea of our timeline. How am I suppose to do my job?"

Mary decided to coach him by challenging his use of words. She asked, "Never? There's "never" been a time that Mark has updated you?" Mary noticed Robert's tendency was to use absolute terms to describe his frustrations. These words were not only inaccurate, they had a tendency to magnify the situation in the eyes of others.

Robert responded, "Well, not never."

"So he has updated you?" she asked.

"Well, yeah." he responded reluctantly.

Mary knew she started to get through to Robert and decided to dig deeper. She asked him to think about words he could use to describe his experience that were not so absolute.

At that point, Robert realized that he was making it worse for himself. He had conversations in his head and out loud that were not completely accurate. "I suppose I should really watch myself. You're right, I'm thinking back to conversations I've had when I use those kinds of words to describe what I'm seeing around me. It is not 100% accurate, and people who don't know the situation accept it as the truth and ultimately, so do I. A more accurate statement of my situation would be, 'There are times when Mark does not update me on his projects.'" Mary was gratified that they were getting somewhere.

## **Change Behaviors**

"Do you notice when he's not updating you?" Mary asked again. She wanted to fully understand the situation and know more about behaviors that were exhibited. This would give them something tangible to work on.

With a reflective look on his face, Robert responded, "Well, when he is overloaded, he completely forgets to let me know. More than

likely, that means his deliverable dates are slipping and he hasn't been writing code as quickly as he thought he would."

"So what could you do to make sure you are kept up-to-date?" Mary asked. "I suppose if I don't hear from him at least once a week, I could make sure I stop by his cubicle on Friday mornings to check in with him."

This was exactly what Mary wanted: To ask Robert a series of questions that would get him to think about different things he could do to make the situation better for himself. As long as he came up with the ideas, he owned them and would likely follow through. At this point, Mary could have stopped the conversation. Robert already had some new action items, but she decided to dig even deeper. He had been complaining about this issue for a long time. He diminishes his own effectiveness when he gets visibly upset. The new action items will change the situation in the short run, but what about the long run? Mary did not want to take that chance. Besides, he was receptive to the conversation so far and seemed open to talking about it some more. Mary thought he was open to examining what was underneath his actions and words.

### **Change Perspectives**

"I'm noticing that certain team members easily frustrate you. What's that about?" Mary inquired.

"Well, wouldn't you get frustrated, too! When they don't do their jobs, I can't do mine." Robert started raising his voice. "That's not fair of them to do that to me. I have responsibilities I need to deliver on! They don't care about anyone but themselves. That's how things are in this company."

Mary decided to respond by raising her voice slightly to build behavioral rapport. She initially matched his intensity to demonstrate she understood, then slowly lowered her voice to calm him down and have him follow her lead. She responded, "What could you do instead of becoming frustrated and losing your cool. Let's admit it, you do get visibly upset in our team meetings."

"I know I can go off the handle," he interrupted. "It's just so upsetting. Do you suppose they don't respect me?" He stopped for a second and immediately came back with, "Oh, who cares anyways, I can't spend my life worrying about what others think!"

"No, you can't spend your life that way, but it does make you less effective from what I'm noticing. People tune out at that point. If I was in their shoes and being scolded in front of my peers and new boss, I know it would be hard for me not to tune out."

"I know."

"Instead of getting frustrated, what do you suppose are some other ways for you to experience the situation next time it happens?"

"I want to be more effective." He paused, "I guess I could remind myself that they are doing the best they can and I need to support them. That's my job. It is my job to support them even if they are overloaded," he repeated.

Mary was satisfied with the answer. Through her leading questions, Robert came to the realization himself that he had other options for how he wanted to react and experience the situation. She successfully asked clarification questions to assess the situation. Then, she successfully asked leading questions to enable Robert to take responsibility for his new options. This is **ITM Coaching™**.

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

**ITM Coaching™** works because it is consistent with the way work gets accomplished and information flows in organizations. It goes with the system instead of fighting it: It leverages the conversations that are already in place and occurring daily. It demystifies coaching and breaks it down to 3-steps that managers can use and remember as they move through their day. The next time you are in a conversation, notice if there are learning opportunities. How will you turn these opportunities into coaching moments?

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