

RYP Quarterly

From Manager to Coach: Why a Coaching Mindset Is the New Leadership Advantage

By David Stewart



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Leadership today is not just about title, tenure, or technical knowledge. It's about trust, relationships, and the ability to bring out the best in people. The most effective leaders don't see themselves as the decision-makers-in-chief, but as enablers, those who empower others to think, grow, and lead.

A coaching mindset is fast becoming one of the most valuable leadership capabilities in modern organisations. Whether you're leading a small team in a warehouse, managing a busy retail operation, or running a corporate division, the principle is the same: your greatest asset is your people, and coaching is how you unlock their full potential.

What Is a Coaching Mindset?

A coaching mindset is the belief that every person has the potential to improve, learn, and succeed, and that the leader's role is to help them discover and develop that potential.

Leaders with a coaching mindset:

- Listen more than they lecture.
- Guide, rather than dictate.
- Grow people, not just manage them

It's a way of thinking that prioritises **curiosity over control, questions over commands, and development over directives**. Instead of focusing purely on results, coaching leaders focus on the people who deliver those results.

Where a traditional manager might ask, "What went wrong?" a coaching leader asks, "What did we learn?" Where a traditional manager might say, "Here's what to do next," a coaching leader says, "What options do you see?" This shift sounds subtle, but it's transformational. It changes how teams think, how they feel, and how they perform.

Coaching Mindset vs Growth Mindset: What's the Difference?

The two are related but distinct.

A growth mindset, made famous by psychologist Carol Dweck, is the belief that intelligence, ability, and talent can be developed through effort, learning, and perseverance. It's about you and how you respond to challenges and feedback.

A coaching mindset, on the other hand, takes that belief and turns it outward. It's about others, believing in their ability to grow, and committing yourself to helping them do so.

A growth mindset says, "I can get better."

A coaching mindset says, "You can get better, and I'll help you."

This distinction matters. Many leaders have a growth mindset for themselves but slip into fixed-mindset behaviour with their teams, assuming certain people “just don’t have it” or “aren’t leadership material.” Coaching breaks that pattern. It creates a culture where learning, feedback, and improvement are not just accepted but expected.

The Business Case for Coaching

The evidence is clear: a coaching-led culture drives performance. Research shows that teams led by coaching-style managers perform up to 40% better than those under traditional command-and-control leaders.

That improvement shows up in measurable ways:

- Lower staff turnover — people stay where they feel valued and developed.
- Better problem-solving — employees think critically instead of waiting for instructions.
- Stronger internal capability — teams learn to lead themselves.

In high-performing organisations, coaching isn’t a “nice to have,” it’s a strategic advantage. It builds resilience, accountability, and engagement from the inside out.

From Manager to Coach: What Changes

The transition from managing to coaching isn’t about doing less — it’s about doing differently. Here’s the shift in mindset and method:

Traditional Manager	Coaching Leader
Tells Controls Evaluates Directs Focuses on compliance	Asks Facilitates Reflects Co-creates Focuses on growth

A coaching leader doesn’t hand over responsibility, they **empower ownership**. They don’t spoon-feed answers, they **help people find their own**. And they don’t avoid accountability; they **build it collaboratively**. You don’t need to be a psychologist or hold a coaching certificate. You just need curiosity, care, and a few consistent habits.

How the Coaching Dynamic Works Day-to-Day

In most workplaces, coaching doesn't happen in scheduled sessions or formal programs. It happens in the flow of daily business. The best leaders use everyday moments to coach — a quick chat after a meeting, a debrief after a project, or a conversation over coffee.

Here's how that looks in practice:

1. **Listen actively:** Resist the urge to jump in or "fix." Give your full attention. The goal is to understand before being understood.
2. **Ask powerful questions - Try:**
 - "What's your take on this?"
 - "What do you think needs to happen?"
 - "What options have you considered?"
- *Questions like these stimulate ownership and critical thinking.*
3. **Stay present:** Coaching requires presence. Phones down, eyes up. People feel the difference when you're truly listening.
4. **Give feedback often — and positively:** Feedback shouldn't just be about correction. Recognition and encouragement shape performance more powerfully than criticism.
5. **Build accountability without blame:** Support people to follow through on commitments. Replace "Why didn't you?" with "What got in the way, and what can we do next time?"

These micro-moments compound. Over time, they create a culture where people feel supported and responsible, the sweet spot for high performance.

The Excuses That Hold Leaders Back

Even experienced managers fall into traps that limit coaching effectiveness. Common ones include:

- **"I don't have time."**

Coaching doesn't have to be long. A five-minute conversation can shift someone's perspective.

- **"They just want answers."**

They might, but true growth happens when people learn to think for themselves.

- **"I'm not a trained coach."**

You don't need formal credentials. You need genuine curiosity and consistency.

Every conversation is a chance to shape thinking, confidence, and capability.

Coaching Attitudes, Behaviours, Standards, and Disciplines

The best coaching leaders operate with intention. Their success is built on four interlocking elements:

1. **Attitudes:** They believe in people's capacity to grow. Their starting assumption is that people want to do well.
2. **Behaviours:** They model what they expect. They listen, stay calm under pressure, and demonstrate respect.
3. **Standards:** They are clear about non-negotiables: safety, integrity, and performance expectations. Coaching is not soft; it's structured and accountable.
4. **Disciplines:** They make coaching a consistent practice. It's not occasional or reactive; it's embedded in how they lead.

These leaders understand that before you can build **skills**, you must build **commitment**. That means gauging where someone is mentally and emotionally. Are they willing? Do they have the mindset to grow?

Once that's clear, the coaching approach becomes more targeted, blending challenge with support, and stretching people without breaking them.

The Power of Positive Shaping (The 1:5 Rule)

People learn best when they feel safe and supported. A proven coaching approach is the 1:5 rule — for every negative or corrective piece of feedback, offer five positive reinforcements. This isn't about empty praise; it's about reinforcing progress and building confidence. People who feel capable are more likely to take initiative, solve problems, and own outcomes.

If someone doubts their ability, they'll defer to others or disengage entirely. Positive shaping builds the mindset and momentum that fuels performance.

Courageous Conversations: Coaching When It's Tough

Avoiding difficult conversations doesn't protect your team — it poisons them. When behaviour drifts, performance slips, or attitudes sour, silence is not kindness.

Courageous leaders step in early, with respect and clarity. Here's a simple framework to approach tough coaching moments:

1. **Ask yourself:** Is this hurting the team or culture?
2. **Check your headsapce:** Be calm and clear before you engage.
3. **Plan your approach:** Be curious, not confrontational.
4. **Explore their view:** Listen deeply before sharing yours.
5. **Problem-solve together:** Agree on actions and accountability.

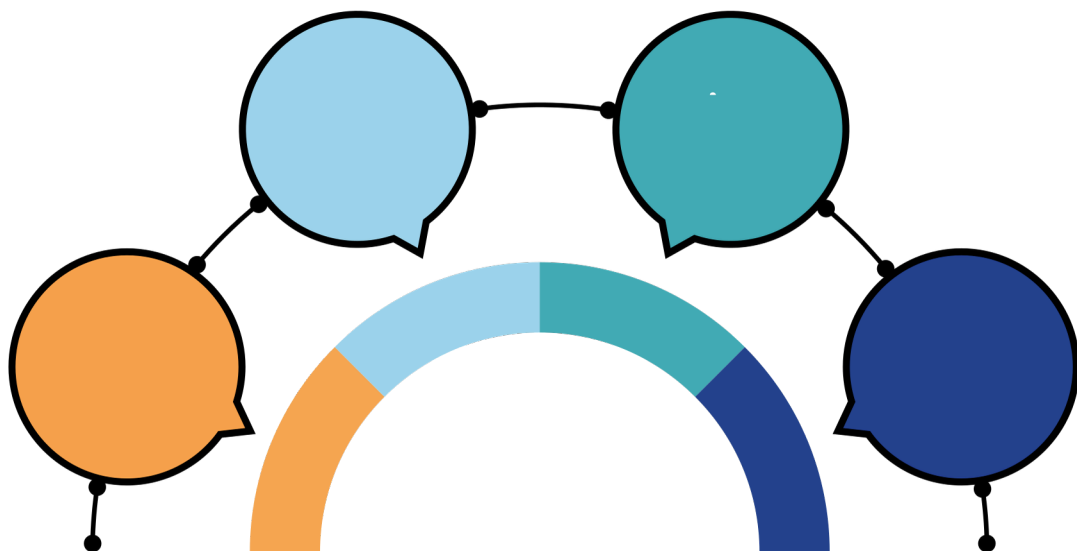
*Handled well, these conversations strengthen trust and respect.
They send a message: "I care enough to help you improve."*

Leadership Lesson: *Be the Leader People Remember*

The leaders we remember most weren't just the ones who gave us instructions, they were the ones who believed in us, stretched us, and helped us grow. In any business, great leaders don't just manage work, they shape mindsets, culture, and capability. They create energy and belief that outlasts them.

Coaching is not another management fad. It's a human skill that transcends industries and generations. It's how leaders turn potential into performance and workplaces into communities of growth.

Facta Non-Verba – Deeds Not Words



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