

What is Situational Coaching? An Introduction

October 18, 2023

Most business leaders know that their employees rely on regular training and development to deliver exceptional performance. This is particularly true in the sales landscape, where methodologies, processes, and consumer behaviors are constantly evolving.

Coaching is one of the primary ways business leaders can assist employees in developing crucial [soft and hard skills](#) over time. But there are many different ways to approach the coaching process. Coaches can leverage different styles of leadership, different training methodologies, and even unique strategies based on their goals, and the needs of their students.

Since people learn and adapt in different ways, it's fair to assume there's no one-size-fits-all coaching approach that works for everyone. It's this thought that led to the development of the 'situational coaching model' - a coaching strategy that adapts to suit different needs and circumstances.

What is Situational Coaching?

Situational coaching builds on the concept of 'situational leadership'. The situational leadership theory suggests no specific leadership style is best for every individual. Instead, it encourages leaders to adopt different methods based on the circumstances in question.

The theory outlines that the most effective leaders are the ones that can adapt their style to the situation, using cues, such as the type of task, the nature of the group, and other factors, to guide their decisions. Situational coaching follows a similar vein, but focuses on coaches, rather than leaders.

With situational coaching, coaches, and mentors tailor their style to the unique circumstances and needs of their learners. They recognize that different situations require different levels of support and guidance. Experts use a combination of directive and nondirective coaching styles, using guidance and feedback, as well as active listening and open-ended questioning.

In the workplace, situational coaching helps to equip managers with the tools and knowledge they need to begin implementing the situational leadership process.

Exploring the Situational Coaching Model

The situational coaching model can be an incredible tool for coaches to engage in meaningful interactions with clients. This model can vary in structure, but usually comprises of 6 steps, designed to help coaches navigate the teaching process in a flexible format.

The key paradigms of the situational coaching model include:

1: Setting Goals

The first step in implementing a situational coaching strategy is setting goals that keep the student motivated, and focused on a specific outcome. During an initial coaching session, the coach will discuss the long-term and short-term targets of the student with them in depth.

Notably, in this conversation, the coach may also encourage students to think carefully about what they've accomplished so far, and what's reasonably achievable within their desired time frame. This will help to establish the foundations for 'SMART' goal setting.

2: Exploration

Just as 'discovery' is often an important stage in the sales cycle, it can also be a valuable part of the situational coaching framework. During the 'exploration' phase, coaches encourage students to imagine how they might be able to achieve their goals, exploring potential ideas and opportunities.

The key to success during this stage is ensuring no idea is overlooked. The best coaches will foster open and creative thinking, inspiring their students to think outside of the box. They may also discuss learning styles and strategies that have worked for the student in the past.

3: Analysis

In the analysis stage, coaches and their students take a closer look at the roadmap for goal attainment. This starts by figuring out where the student stands at the moment, and how much work they need to do to reach their desired targets. For instance, if a student is [transitioning into sales](#) for the first time, their goal might be to start hitting their quotas within the first 3 months.

To achieve this goal, the student would need to develop specific sales skills they could use to convert customers, and build rapport with clients. If a student has no prior experience in the sales landscape, they may need to invest extra time in training and experimentation. However, if they have transferrable skills (such as communication and collaboration skills) from previous roles, they might be able to use these to start progressing towards their targets faster.

4: Releasing

The 'releasing' stage of the situational coaching process is one of the more unique 'paradigms' of the model. It encourages the professional or 'mentee' in the situation to take a closer look at the internal blockers that might be preventing them from reaching their targets.

For instance, a student might have access to all of the resources they need to learn new sales skills, but their lack of confidence or fear of failure could be preventing them from accessing help. During this stage, the coach's role is to be an empathetic listener. By asking questions about the student's fears and concerns, they can begin to move them towards a more lucrative 'growth mindset'.

5: Decision

In the decision stage, mentors and coaches encourage coaches to actively start making choices about how they're going to progress towards their targets. It's important not to rush students during this process, as some will need extra time to experiment with ideas and explore opportunities.

However, if a mentee is struggling to decide, asking questions to find out why they're reluctant can be helpful. It might be that the student doesn't know enough about a certain development option to dive in head-first. If this is the case, providing them with more information and documentation can help to build their confidence.

6: Action

The final stage in the situational coaching framework involves actually taking action. Coaches and their students sit down together and plan exactly which steps the student is going to take to move towards their targets, and how they're going to monitor their progress.

During this stage, it's important to be clear about what each step will involve. Students should define what they're going to do, when they're going to do it, and what sort of support they're going to need along the way. Once an action plan is established, the coach regularly checks in with the student to find out how much progress they're making.

These regular check-ins serve two purposes. First, they ensure a coach can provide actionable guidance throughout their relationship with their mentee. Secondly, they ensure the coach and the professional in question can explore new ideas, or pivot to a new strategy if the initial plan doesn't work. Situational coaching allows for continuous flexibility.

The Role of a Situational Coach and Techniques to Use

The role of a situational coach is a little different to that of a standard coach or mentor in most business environments. These professionals aren't just responsible for supplying their 'students' with relevant tools, resources, and training to help them reach their goals.

Instead, situational coaches act as a mentor, enabler, and educator all at the same time. They help students to access valuable tools for learning, but they also ensure they have the right mindset to pursue genuine development and change.

Throughout the coaching journey, the situational coach can use a number of techniques to support their learner, such as:

- **Active listening:** Actively listening to the coachee through each stage of the process ensures the coach can fully understand the challenges they face, and deliver relevant suggestions and guidance. It also helps to build rapport and trust between the two professionals.

- **Empathy:** Situational coaching requires a significant amount of empathy. It encourages coaches to understand that every employee or professional has different fears, weaknesses, strengths, and abilities.
- **Guided reflection:** Situational coaches often encourage their learners to do most of the work of 'reaching their goals' themselves, through guided reflection. They encourage people to examine their abilities, explore options, and assess blockers to their targets carefully.
- **Collaboration:** Throughout the situational coaching model, the coach and their student will regularly collaborate on the search for the right learning strategies and development opportunities. They'll also work together to overcome hurdles that may occur.
- **Performance tracking:** Situational coaches help to keep employees motivated and focused, by encouraging them to actively track their progress. They look for evidence of measurable progress, whether it's in the professional's sales numbers, confidence, or elsewhere.

Unlocking the Benefits of Situational Coaching

Situational coaching is an excellent strategy for professional development. In the sales landscape, where the learning styles and needs of employees can vary drastically, situational coaching ensures every team member can access the right level of support.

Rather than taking a rigid approach to training and development, situational coaches work collaboratively with each employee, to create a bespoke strategy for growth. The result is often faster progress, more engaged team members, and higher levels of employee satisfaction.

Reap the benefits of situational coaching firsthand by learning from the best in the [HardSkill Exchange!??](#)