

## **Stop Directing, Start Coaching!**

*Published in Career Times*

**Encourage employees to "own" business problems**

**By Charlie Lang, Executive Coach & Trainer @ Progress-U Limited**



---

**Stop Directing, Start Coaching!**

© Progress-U Limited ♦ [Charlie.Lang@progressu.com.hk](mailto:Charlie.Lang@progressu.com.hk) ♦ [www.progressu.com.hk](http://www.progressu.com.hk)

With the global workforce becoming increasingly knowledgeable, well qualified and mobile, today's business leaders are finding that the directive style of communication no longer fits the needs of the modern organization. This was traditionally used within rigid company hierarchies, but it has become necessary to adapt with the times and to recognize that management priorities should now focus more on coaching in order to create higher levels of employee engagement.

Coaching has become something of a buzzword in recent years and can easily be misunderstood or underestimated. However, if correctly applied, it can accelerate the process of learning and improve the quality of individual performance and overall business results.

A key element in the process and in any "coaching conversation" is to encourage others to accept "ownership" of situations. Most managers find doing that a problem since it conflicts with their view that they must exercise authority. To illustrate, let's take the example of Tom. He is the CEO of a mid-sized company with 800 employees. On his way to a meeting, he bumps into Shellie, the HR director, and starts an informal conversation. It goes like this:

T: Hi, how are things?

S: Not too bad. I'm just a bit stressed now. We're having trouble with the export sales team. Their figures are down and Jeffrey, the sales director, has suggested replacing Martin, the export sales manager.

T: Yes, I heard there's a problem.

---

### **Stop Directing, Start Coaching!**

S: I think we should give Martin a chance to fix things, especially as he has performed well up to now.

T: Well, I think that if the figures are not OK within the next two months, we should fire Martin. See you later.

S: Thanks. See you later.

What happened in this conversation? The HR director shared a concern and outlined how to handle it. The CEO, believing he was being asked for "help" and should give his recommendation or direction, assumed ownership. In fact, Shellie now has little option but to follow the CEO's suggestion. She is more than likely to feel frustrated and less motivated than before, rather than grateful for the CEO's input.

Managers at all levels fall into this trap. As soon as they have some degree of authority, they think their role calls for them to exercise it at every opportunity. However, a first-class leader would handle things differently and use the coaching approach. With this, Tom and Shellie's conversation could have gone like this:

S: I think we should give Martin a chance ...

T: What do you have in mind?

S: Well, I suggested that the sales director monitors things until the end of the year. I've spoken to Martin who said he has a lot of deals pending, which should be finalized in the next few months. He is confident of reaching the annual target.

T: What does the sales director think?

---

### **Stop Directing, Start Coaching!**

S: He's worried about not hitting his budget if the export department falls short this year.

T: I want you to think about what will work for all parties.

S: I'm not really sure. Do you have any suggestions?

T: We had a similar situation a few years ago and resolved it after a detailed review with the full sales team about how to boost performance. They came up with some good ideas which helped to increase revenue and get things back on track.

S: I'll suggest that to Jeffrey. It could help to upgrade everyone's sales performance and give us some extra time to assess if Martin's clients really are going to come through with new business.

T: Good luck. Let me know how it goes.

Clearly, there is a difference in approach. Tom did not give an instruction but provided guidance and suggestions. Shellie still had full ownership of the problem, as well as the motivation and encouragement to solve it.

Tom acted as a true coach by listening carefully and asking appropriate questions. He shared his experience, without insisting his approach was the only way, and allowed Shellie to decide on the next step.

Skillful coaching will also include elements of goal setting, planning, designing actions, and managing progress and accountability. A necessary precondition for successful coaching is that good rapport exists between the parties involved in the process.

---

### **Stop Directing, Start Coaching!**

If it is to work well, managers must develop a specific set of competencies, which are not easily acquired. For example, in today's hectic work environment, many managers have trouble focusing on one issue or one person at a time. Their minds are already anticipating the answer to the problem under discussion without listening to all the details, or they are thinking about their next meeting. However, if leaders master the techniques of coaching, they can dramatically transform their organization's communication culture. They will find this leads to new levels of engagement and success.



Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to develop his clients to become First-Class Leaders. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

In 2004, he initiated the Master Coach Alliance ( see <http://www.master-coach-alliance.com> ) in Hong Kong, a network of professional Life, Business and Corporate Coaches. End of 2004, he started authoring the book "The Groupness Factor" ( see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm> ) which got published in August 2005.

---

**Stop Directing, Start Coaching!**