

Pipelines and Grids: Tools from Executive Coaching for Safety Leaders

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Introduction

Today's safety professionals are always on the hunt for new ways to improve safety performance. And most, if not all, will agree that safety leadership is one of those areas where tools would come in handy. Safety leadership training and consulting have been an ongoing part of the evolution of safety management and in recent years, "coaching" has become somewhat of a buzzword in safety circles. The arena of executive coaching is well-established in leadership development and in this paper, we will present 1) an overview of why a coaching approach to safety leadership might be used and what coaching opportunities and roles there are, 2) who are potential candidates for safety leadership coaching, and 3) two tools for using coaching for safety leadership.

The Coaching Approach

Why coach?

Before jumping into any particular approach or model, the first question to answer is why? What does coaching bring to safety and the development of safety culture?

Coaching has been an effective process for increasing leadership capacity for individuals from new, frontline leaders all the way to executives looking to refine their skills (Stober & Grant, 367+). Coaching can provide a context for leaders to identify "growing edges" of development, get feedback on goals and efforts, and be held accountable on their progress. Using a coaching approach to safety leadership can up-skill organizational capacity: those who lead safety well lead well in other areas too.

In addition, most safety professionals recognize that high-performance safety requires leadership and the ability to influence others. It is not enough to know regulations, safe work practices, or how to design safer procedures. Since it is people that put those regulations, practices, and procedures into operation, either directly through production work or through supervision and management decisions, strong safety leadership is an absolute must. And since

rarely do we accomplish any complex job or project individually, the ability to interact effectively with others and influence them to work safe is key to good safety leadership.

Safety professionals also recognize that being viewed as a true resource rather than someone who primarily relies on compliance and corrective action means they must be able to use influence well. The role of being a positive influence for safe production of work marries well with the general aims of coaching. When describing the objectives for coaching by managers or leaders within organizations, Ellinger et al. (258) summarize a number of studies' results:

- Coaching to help employees see developmental opportunities
- Coaching to empower people to go further than previous levels of performance
- Coaching to help others learn through guidance, encouragement, and support for the learner
- Coaching as facilitating a learning process to improve performance

Coaching requires the coach to let go of needing to control others and instead look for opportunities to help others see where they might further develop and how they might refine their safety leadership. For the safety professional, being a resource for the development of others' safety leadership can be a role, as in coaching safety personnel direct reports, or can be an activity when engaging in coaching conversations with individuals outside the HSE function (e.g., operational personnel). Safety professionals can benefit from understanding ways they can implement a coaching approach in their interactions, recognizing which individuals might be good candidates for coaching dialogues, and having some coaching tools for those conversations. We will talk about each of these in turn.

Manager-as-Coach

For those you may supervise or lead, you may take a more direct “manager-as-coach” role that focuses on the development of those you lead (Hunt & Weintraub, 7-8). In a manager-as-coach role, you are seeking to focus on opportunities to help develop your people to be the best safety professionals for your organization.

A coaching manager approach requires a mindset of wanting to help others develop, a belief that others want to learn, less need for control, openness to learning and hearing feedback, high standards, and an approach to employee development that does not rely on a “sink or swim” approach (Hunt & Weintraub, 91). Managers who are effective coaches see a distinction between coaching as being “all about people, helping them to grow and develop” and managing as “telling people what to do” (Ellinger & Bostrom, 156). They see coaching as a way to leverage their people's desire to learn by asking questions, providing feedback, and sometimes even prodding others to make new choices. The HSE manager-as-coach recognizes that part of their responsibility as a leader is to spend some of their time in regular conversations with their people.

Influencing Others: Coaching Conversations

There is another opportunity for a coaching approach that is less defined: using coaching conversations with those you would seek to influence. Many safety professionals are in a functional capacity that supports those in operations—the infamous “dotted line.” Taking a manager-as-coach role may not be possible for an HSE advisor who interacts daily with front line

supervisors; however, they have a prime opportunity to influence those supervisors through a coaching conversation.

Coaching conversations are dialogues that intentionally seek to provide a learning opportunity. Often the one leading the conversations (we'll call them the coach) and the person being engaged (let's call them the coachee) each potentially will learn: something about themselves, the other person, and potentially ways to be more effective in the future. A coaching approach allows the HSE professional to engage others who may not report to them but whom they would like to influence.

It is vital to understand one's intent and goal for these types of conversations. Entering into a conversation with the intent to "fix" or force compliance in order to get someone to fall into line is not only inconsistent with a coaching approach but has the potential to blow up in one's face. Rather, if your intent is to foster awareness and engage the other person in a real dialogue, a coaching conversation can build trust, open communication and feedback loops, and result in new, potentially more effective interactions and decisions.

Once you have decided you want to use coaching as one of your tools to build a stronger safety culture, it is key to look at who are good potential candidates for coaching.

Coaching Candidates

Who to coach?

The next question to answer is who will get the most benefit from coaching? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to identify what the goal is for the individual to be coached. The obvious goals for the organization are to strengthen individuals' safety leadership and the individual's ability to strengthen the safety culture by influencing others.

Candidates for safety leadership coaching come at several levels of organizations. HSE personnel can benefit from safety leadership coaching specifically geared to help them develop their skills in communicating effectively, being used as a resource (rather than seen as an "enforcer"), among other potential areas for development. Frontline leaders are prime candidates for safety leadership coaching. Since frontline leaders are often a crucial pivot point for translating management's expectations and safety vision to the workforce, developing their leadership of safety can have immense benefits. Senior leaders can benefit from coaching as they develop performance standards, management systems, etc. Strong safety leaders at senior management levels, whether they are safety professionals or operational executives, can strengthen safety cultures by influencing how safety as a value is interwoven into the fabric of running the business.

Let's take a look at two specific types of individuals that safety leadership coaching can benefit:

- The HSE professional who comes across as the "enforcer": We'll call him Tom. Tom is a safety advisor interacting with the workforce out on site. While it is clear that he wants to see people make safe choices, he comes across as "carrying a big stick" and often uses negative consequences as his main way to try to influence others. As a result, front line supervisors see him as an obstacle and person to avoid whenever possible. They rarely, if ever, seek him out as a resource. Tom has expressed the thought that "you have to ride these guys to get them to work safe"

and this appears to be his frame of mind and approach. He gets frustrated when his attempts at influencing others' behavior are not as effective as he would like.

- The high potential leader: Rick is a superintendent who is a rising star in the organization. He is known for being able to lead teams get the job done well. Rick has used safety personnel as resources, and while he is not seen as “on a safety soapbox” he has respect from those reporting to him and his peers as someone who runs safe projects that perform. Management has noticed.

Improving the safety leadership capacities of these individuals can be a significant contribution to the safety culture of an organization, the culture of a worksite or project, and even to the success of a particular job effort, whether project-based or site-based. For Tom, a manager-as-coach approach could be key to increasing Tom's effectiveness. For Rick, a more informal coaching conversation approach could be a way to influence him towards higher performance as a safety leader.

Two Coaching Tools

Another key point in using a coaching approach is that successful coaching conversations are not random. They require some thought as to who is a good potential for coaching conversations and how to have that conversation. While going into a conversation with the outcome already in your mind is likely to move the conversation into “telling” rather than learning, preparing yourself in terms of the process is well worth the time and thought. The first step is to identify what the goal for the coaching conversation is. Is it general safety leadership and becoming a safety champion, as in Rick's case, or is it a more specific goal such as being more effective as a safety resource, as in the case of Tom? Once the coach is clear on what the purpose of the coaching is, the next step is to gain the person's agreement to have a coaching conversation. In itself, getting that person's agreement means outlining your intent and offering the opportunity.

While there are a myriad of coaching tools and frameworks, there are a couple that lend themselves readily to coaching leadership in the context of safety. Let's take a look at what they are and how they can be used to guide coaching conversations.

The Development Pipeline

The Development Pipeline is a tool used in leadership coaching that identifies five necessary conditions for behavior change and where coaching can be most effective (Peterson, 2006):

- *Insight.* The extent of understanding what areas need development to be an effective safety leader.
- *Motivation.* The degree to which the individual is willing to invest time and effort to developing their safety leadership.
- *Capabilities.* The extent to which skills and knowledge for safety leadership are present
- *Real-world practice.* The existence of opportunities to practice new safety leadership skills within their role.
- *Accountability.* The internal and external means that is available for feedback and reinforcement of safety leadership development.

This tool aligns with what psychology knows about how people make and sustain behavior change. A large body of research outlines the stages of change involving changing thoughts (becoming aware of the need for change to thinking through how to make the change) to putting change into action and maintaining change. Prochaska and DiClemente's Stages of Change Model (2003) is an evidence-based model of change for a variety of behaviors. Stober (537) outlined how safety professionals can use the principles of this model to appropriately target conversations and efforts to influence others based on what stage the other person is in. Aligning these with the Pipeline, Insight and Motivation can be seen as needed ingredients for moving from lack of awareness for the need to change to contemplating and preparing to make a change. Individuals would also need to marshal their capabilities in order to move from preparing to make a change to action, along with putting those capabilities into real-world practice. And having opportunities for accountability in place can help move action to a habit and maintenance of the change. In summary, the Development Pipeline gives a cognitive and behavioral game plan for making positive change in leadership.

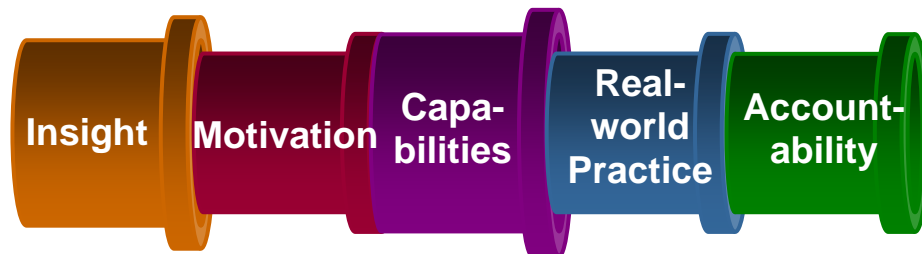


Exhibit 1. The Development Pipeline

Tom's Development Pipeline

In the case of Tom, the abrasive safety advisor, we see an interesting pattern in the Pipeline. One of the beauties of the Development Pipeline is that it allows the coach to assess where the most effective coaching conversation might occur, based on where the “bottleneck” might be. Let's take a look at where coaching conversations might best be deployed:

Insight: Tom appears to lack insight into how his mindset regarding others' attitudes toward safety affects his approach and how others view him. This is an obstacle for Tom to be effective and for the potential for promotion.

Motivation: From what you have seen, Tom has motivation to be effective as a safety leader and genuinely desires to see people work safe. This is a point of leverage you can use as a coaching manager.

Capabilities: From your view, Tom will need to build his people skills, particularly in terms of how to use influence rather than seek to force compliance. Tom is a bright person, so the potential to engage his intellect in the service of more effective interactions may help.

Real-world Practice: Given Tom's position as HSE Advisor, he has many opportunities to put new skills into practice. You recognize that Tom has some hurdles to overcome in getting others to see behavior change in Tom. Getting Tom some training or dedicating time to coaching with him on interactions will likely be helpful.

Accountability: As Tom's manager, you have the ability to ensure that he has regular feedback and time devoted to assessing his progress with him.

To engage Tom with a coaching approach, you have the benefit of being Tom's manager. You intend to start a coaching dialogue with Tom by expressing your sense of responsibility to provide development opportunities for your direct reports and that you would like to have regular conversations that are focused on Tom's growth and development as a safety leader. Getting Tom's agreement and explicitly stating your intention for the focus on his development is key to clarity and aligning both of your motivations for coaching dialogue. You may choose to work through the Pipeline together, getting Tom's assessment of himself and giving your feedback, or you may also choose to enlist the GAPS Grid as described below.

Rick's Development Pipeline

Now let's turn to our rising star, Rick, to illustrate how the Development Pipeline can guide coaching conversations. While he might be someone the organization might do well to tap for more formal leadership coaching, the safety professional regularly interacting with Rick could use this model to support Rick becoming a true safety champion. Breaking down each step:

Insight: You have heard Rick say before, "As a superintendent, my foremen take their cue about how we work from me." He recognizes his responsibility as a leader to lead safety well. Where he might develop further insight is in how stepping up his championing of safety even further would increase his value to the organization and would likely result in taking on more responsibilities in bigger roles.

Motivation: Rick once worked for a supervisor who pushed production. A co-worker sustained a serious injury as a result of a shortcut one of the crews took. Since that time, Rick has wanted to make sure that none of his people felt like a shortcut at the expense of safety was worth it, and he certainly did not want people to feel that was his expectation.

Capabilities: Rick has demonstrated a number of capabilities for being a safety leader through accessing the HSE professionals as go-to resources for safe work and he has demonstrated his abilities to lead others as evidenced by project performance and the respect of his direct reports. You see that he has great potential to be able to speak to larger groups about the importance of safety and bring an operational perspective to safety initiatives through serving on the Safety Committee.

Real-World Practice: While Rick has plenty of practice on the job at leading safety within his crews, he has not served on the Safety Committee and has had limited opportunities to speak on safety topics to groups larger than his foremen and their people. Upper management has asked you about Rick's potential as a manager at the project level and you have offered to find some ways he can practice his safety leadership at a higher level.

Accountability: Rick certainly has the notice of his leaders yet there has been little communication directly to Rick about his career path or about what steps he needs to take to move up in the organization. You have had good success in the past in your interactions with Rick regarding expectations for safety leadership as a superintendent.

In thinking through the different aspects of Rick's Development Pipeline, the areas where you see potential coaching conversations are regarding development of his leadership capabilities and putting those into practice on the job. You recognize that HSE leadership opportunities such as serving on the Safety Committee and presenting larger safety talks might give Rick opportunities to practice and you will engage Rick in a dialogue about those opportunities.

There is another coaching conversation you want to pursue at a group level. At a site leadership team meeting, you intend to ask for an agenda item about personnel development and succession planning. The question you would like to put to the group is “how do we identify our high potentials and explicitly engage them in developing their capacities?” By asking this question, your aim is to potentially increase insight and motivation into the benefits of conscious succession planning and working directly with identified high potentials on accelerating their development.

The GAPS Grid

David Peterson outlines the GAPS Grid as a model for coaching conversations, particularly when the Pipeline factors of Insight and Motivation are constraints to the individual moving forward, such as in Tom’s case (Peterson, 56). The GAPS Grid can help identify where the person is presently, providing insight into a particular situation, and potential motivations based on what is meaningful to them and to others. The Grid can also be helpful in planning how to work with high-potential leaders like Rick to accelerate their leadership development. There are four quadrants of the grid: Goals, Abilities, Perceptions, and Success Factors (GAPS). Goals and Values pertain to what matters to the person being coached. The Abilities quadrant refers to the person’s view of their skills and capacities. The Perceptions quadrant pertains to how other stakeholders view the person being coached. And Success Factors refers to what factors other stakeholders view as being necessary for the success of the person being coached.

The information that a coachee gains in the columns of “where the person is” is all about Insight—recognizing where they stand and how they are perceived. Clarifying “what matters” in the second column can engage the coachee’s Motivation in terms of what is important to them and can amplify both Insight and Motivation by getting clear on what is needed for them to be successful.

	<i>Where the person is</i>	<i>What matters</i>
<i>The person’s view</i>	<u>A</u>bilities	<u>G</u>oals and Values
	<i>How they see themselves</i>	<i>What matters to the person</i>
<i>Views from other perspectives</i> E.g., boss, coach, colleagues, senior management, peers	<u>P</u>erceptions	<u>S</u>uccess Factors
	<i>How others see the person</i>	<i>What matters to others</i>

Exhibit 2. The GAPS Grid.

Tom’s GAPS Grid

Let’s look at how the GAPS Grid might be used in coaching the abrasive HSE “cop” Tom. In evaluating Tom’s Development Pipeline, we see that in order for him to be more successful as a

safety leader, he will need to develop more insight into his own behavior and motivation to change his style rather than trying to force others to comply. Once you have established the coaching dialogue with Tom, working through the Grid could help Tom see where he can make change and more importantly, can give Tom a process to use his own self-reflection and how to gather important data from others. In giving feedback to Tom, it is essential to present the data as your experience and also tying the feedback to his desire to achieve and desire to contribute to the safety of the organization. You also ask Tom to seek the honest feedback of colleagues he trusts. You may even coach Tom in how to seek that feedback effectively and ask him to outline his approach to such conversations. If need be, role-playing how Tom would ask for feedback would give you an opportunity to give Tom real-time feedback about how he comes across to others.

In working through the quadrants of the Grid, the following data is likely to emerge (with multiple conversations, this grid would expand and become more comprehensive):

	<i>Where the Tom is</i>	<i>What matters</i>
<i>Tom's view</i>	<u>Abilities</u>	<u>Goals and Values</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart • Knows regulations & procedures • Willing to have safety conversations • Persuasive • Straight-talker, calls it like he sees it • Has high standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety performance • Achievement • Results for the project • Contributing to others • Moving up in the organization • Be respected • Have effective interactions
<i>Views from other perspectives</i> E.g., Manager, colleagues, peers	<u>Perceptions</u>	<u>Success Factors</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart • Good intentions, difficult interactions • Safety “cop” • Tough, critical • Points out faults but little else • Guy to avoid rather than seek out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading through influence • People skills • Knowing procedures & regulations • Listening • Being a resource to operations

Exhibit 3. Tom's Hypothetical GAPS Grid.

Through this exercise with Tom, you provide the opportunity for Tom to get data that has likely not been explicit before. Given an initial constraint in Tom's Development Pipeline in Insight, working through the GAPS Grid can give Tom key information that not only raises his awareness of the obstacles in his path as a leader, but also can leverage his motivation to develop further skills and capabilities. Insight is increased by gaining an understanding of any differences between how he views himself compared to how others view Tom, along with clarifying what is important to him and what is important for him to be successful in moving up in the organization. Helping Tom see what is required to be successful, not only in his current role but also in moving up in the organization, is likely to engage his motivations for achievement and promotion. Without these insights, Tom could easily remain frustrated and frustrating to others.

The key potential insights for Tom include: 1) recognizing that his framing of others as needing “constant vigilance” and that the way to get people to work safe is to “carry a big stick” is resulting in others avoiding him and seeing him as an obstacle to get around; 2) in order to be less frustrated and to move up in the organization, he could develop more communication and people skills; 3) his motivations to contribute to others and achieve are levers he can use whenever he finds himself falling back into a defensive position. With these insights and motivations, he can focus on what capabilities would take him towards his goals.

By coaching Tom on gathering feedback from others, you are also giving him the real-world practice he needs in developing capabilities in people skills. This would help Tom remove constraints and move forward in his development as an effective safety professional. As Tom develops his awareness of what capabilities he needs to develop further, the coaching dialogue may move to where opportunities exist, both in his day-to-day responsibilities and potentially in further leadership or communication training. As his manager, you also can assist by continuing to come back to the GAPS Grid as a way to build in feedback and accountability.

Rick’s GAPS Grid

Now let’s look at how the GAPS Grid for high-potentials might be used. Remember Rick, and the coaching conversation that could be had with the site leadership team about being more intentional about succession planning? The GAPS Grid could be a tool for the leadership team to use in general with high-potentials like him.

	<i>Where the Rick is</i>	<i>What matters</i>
<i>Rick’s view</i>	<u>A</u>bilities	<u>G</u>oals and Values
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart • Knows how to get the job done safely • Willing to have safety conversations • Leads others well • Cares about his people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe production • Results for the project • Contributing to others • Moving up in the organization? • Be respected • Have effective interactions
<i>Views from other perspectives</i> E.g., Manager, colleagues, peers	<u>P</u>erceptions	<u>S</u>uccess Factors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart • Lives the company values • Leads his people effectively • Committed to safe production • Could take a more visible leadership role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading through influence • Being a safety champion • People skills • Listening • Developing an effective team • Being a resource to all crafts, not only his

Exhibit 4. Rick’s Hypothetical GAPS Grid.

Remembering that the coaching conversation you decided to have was with the site leadership team as a whole regarding how high-potential leaders are supported and developed, particularly in terms of bringing talent forward in the organization. There are several coaching opportunities to pursue assuming that the leadership team has had the insight, motivation, and

action plan to begin a more formal succession planning effort, and that Rick's manager and you have agreed to involve you in his leadership development.

The coaching dialogue could take the tack of laying out specific links between success as a safety leader, success factors in moving up in the organization, and Rick's values around safe production. You could focus on helping Rick define for himself what it would mean to be a "safety champion" and what that would look like for him in his role. It would be important to have Rick define what actions he would want to take and how those actions would link to his overall development as an effective leader.

In terms of his Development Pipeline, the GAPS Grid could be used to help Rick clarify what capabilities he wants to focus on, how he will put those into practice on the job, how he will get feedback on his efforts, and who he would like to engage in accountability conversations. Given that Rick is not your direct report, working closely with Rick and his manager to coach Rick on using his safety leadership as a career development opportunity is vital. Not only will that keep things running smoothly and information being shared, but also engages the key stakeholders in Rick's development in recognizing his efforts and keeping goals aligned.

Tools like the Development Pipeline and the GAPS Grid can help leaders who want to use a coaching approach to structure their thoughts in having a coaching conversation with others and in a more formal coaching role, can be a framework for ongoing conversations.

Summary

Safety professionals can benefit from having some tools in their leadership toolbox from executive coaching. Whether acting as a coaching manager to one of their direct reports in a more formal managerial role, or looking for opportunities to assist others in the organization to increase their leadership capacities, HSE professionals can take a coaching approach to safety leadership. We have outlined two particular types of potential coaching candidates: the safety advisor and high potential leaders outside the HSE function.

After identifying who is a good candidate for coaching, the first task is getting clear on what the goal is: whether it is general safety leadership or a specific leadership challenge. Two relevant coaching tool frameworks were presented: the Development Pipeline and the GAPS Grid. The Pipeline can be very helpful in assessing where the focus of coaching conversations might be most productive and can be used by the coach to structure a dialogue with the coachee. The Pipeline can identify where a potential constraint to effective leadership might lie and can provide the context for a conversation for the coachee to formulate an action plan including how follow-up and feedback will be incorporated. The GAPS Grid is particularly useful in helping hone in on the factors of insight and motivation in coaching conversations. By focusing on how the person sees themselves, how others see them, what matters to the person, and what others' see as success factors, the coachee can get a great deal of clarity about where they may want to focus change efforts to move closer to a goal. In using these coaching tools together, the coach can provide a great resource and opportunity for the development of others' safety leadership skills and capacities.

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