

A sample activity from the
Fenman trainer's resource:

The Coaching Skills Activity Pack

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Thank you for downloading this sample activity. You are welcome to use this material in your courses.

This sample is just one of 18 activities contained in the trainer's activity pack '*The Coaching Skills Activity Pack*', published by Fenman. Details of the other activities are given at the end of this document.

The Coaching Skills Activity Pack

Contents:

- Introduction
- Activity 9: Improving teamwork using the circle technique
- Full contents listing: 18 activities
- About this resource

Introduction:

This pack contains 18 practical, results-focused activities that will boost performance in individuals, teams, and coaches themselves.

Tap into the simple, yet powerful, messages behind these activities:

- successful coaching depends on the **performer taking ownership** of the task, and following it through to completion to the best of their ability
- the role of the coach is to ask **skilful questions** in a specific sequence to encourage the performer to think through the task themselves
- effective coaches become **more effective managers** - able to leave the individual or team to perform to the best of their ability, freeing them to focus on other responsibilities.

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Activity 9

The coaching circle and teams

Purpose

To use the coaching circle technique to improve teamwork in order to achieve a work objective.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Activity 9

The coaching circle and teams

Introduction

This is a powerful and enjoyable activity which provides an opportunity for participants to work as a team. It uses the coaching circle technique to focus on improving how they work together in order to complete the task in hand and achieve the set objective.

Purpose

To use the coaching circle technique to improve teamwork in order to achieve a work objective.

Application

Use this activity with any group who need to improve their team-working abilities. It is also an excellent activity to use with customer support or sales staff who must focus on how to deliver high-quality customer service. Participants should already have completed *Activity 3 The coaching circle*.

You can use the activity with team members, or with managers who will then go back to their own teams and apply these techniques. This activity can also be used to reinforce *Activity 8 Building a better team*.

What happens

You set the group a task which requires them to work as a team in order to complete it satisfactorily. It is a ball game called 'hot potato (or satisfying the customer)'.

The participants begin by setting a team goal. They then each set a personal goal – what they will do to contribute to better teamwork.

You then start the exercise, using the coaching circle technique at intervals, to review their progress and keep them on track towards their team goal.

When they have achieved their goal and produced a result that will 'satisfy the customer', you lead a full review of individual and team performances.

Time

Overall time required: 1 hour 30 minutes to 1 hour 50 minutes

- Briefing and introduction: 5 minutes
- Setting team and individual goals: 20 minutes
- Hot potato: 40–60 minutes
- Review and wrap-up: 25 minutes

Materials & resources

- 2 Handout masters:
 - 9.1 *The coaching circle*
 - 9.2 *Hot potato (or satisfying the customer)*
- Trainer's brief:
 - 9.3 *Hot potato – leading the exercise*
- Flipchart and stand or whiteboard
- Marker pens for trainer
- Paper and pens for participants
- Wall, screens or whiteboard for displaying flipchart pages
- Tape, Blu-Tack® or pins
- 4 balls – three to be similar; for example, tennis balls, and one to be different; for example, a football
- A free work area of at least six square metres

In preparation

If the group are all from the same organisation, you'll find it helpful to know what their manager(s) would like them to achieve as a team – you can use that information to help the participants focus on their team and personal goals.

Study **Trainer's brief 9.3** *Hot potato – leading the exercise*, so that you are familiar with the process. You will then be clear about what result you are looking for and able to deal effectively with participants' questions.

How do I do it?

BRIEFING AND INTRODUCTION

Set the scene by asking the participants to comment on the idea of a 'team'. Ask for a definition of a 'good' team. Write their suggestions on the flipchart so you can refer to them later.

If they are all from the same organisation or work group, you might enquire how 'good' a team they are now. Confirm that they would like to improve.

Explain that you will invite them to complete a task, to your satisfaction. It will take at least 30 minutes to do properly and could take an hour if they do not perform well as a team.

Tell them that the task requires high quality work and refer to the flipchart notes you made earlier.

Someone may ask what the task is. At this point tell them that's not really important – a good team performs well regardless of the task.

SETTING TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL GOALS

Now ask the participants to convert the notes you have on the flipchart into a goal that an effective team might set itself.

If you decide to use the SMARTER acronym, write it on the flipchart and ask them to complete the term:

Specific
Measurable
Agreed
Realistic
Timebound
Exciting/challenging
Recorded

Ask the group for suggestions. You might want to make the initial discussion a 5 minute buzz session, after which everyone improves the suggested goals until they have a single SMARTER goal for their team.

As an example, you might end up with:

- We will complete the task satisfactorily within 45 minutes. To do this we will work together in such a way that everyone will be able to contribute fully to teamwork and to getting the job done.

Confirm that everyone is happy with the team goal. Write it on a sheet of flipchart paper for wall display and for future reference.

Now invite them to write their personal goals on what they will do or be like in order to, for example, 'work together' and 'contribute fully'.

Allow about 2 minutes for this and then ask each person to share their goal with the rest of the participants.

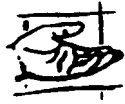
They will have set goals like:

- I will be an effective leader.
- I will be positive and enthusiastic throughout.
- I will support the rest of the team.

Very quickly seek clarification on each goal. This will enable each team member to know what to expect from the others and so they can encourage everyone else to contribute. For example:

- What do you mean by *effective*?
- What will you do to be *positive and enthusiastic*?
- What *support* will you give? Who will you give it to? When will you give it?

Allow a few minutes for them to clarify their personal goal. It's OK if more than one person sets the same goal. Effective teams usually have more than one member who wants to 'co-operate fully' or to be 'positive and enthusiastic'.



Distribute Handout 9.1

The coaching circle

Ask each participant to write the team goal and their own personal goals in Box 2.

Tell them that when they are working on the task, you will remind them of their team and personal goals. In this way they will achieve the objective by focusing on their own and the team's actions.

HOT POTATO



Distribute Handout 9.2

Hot potato (or satisfying the customer)

Allow the participants a few minutes to read the handout and ask any questions. Answer them in accordance with the **Trainer's brief 9.3 Hot potato** – leading the exercise.

Then invite them to join you in the free work area and give all the balls to whoever wanted to be, for example, an effective leader.

Ask them to begin and stand back for 5 minutes or so. You should bring the flipchart into the free work area so the team can use it. (Most won't even notice it's there.)

During these 5 minutes, make your comments and ask your questions. If you have a go-between, make your comments to them so that they can pass them on to the team.

After 5 minutes stop the action, unless it is progressing well, and ask the following questions:

- How well would you say you are progressing with the task?
- How well are you performing as a team – bearing in mind your team goal?

- What have you been doing to meet your own personal goal?

Allow some time for general comment. If the discussion refocuses the team, let them continue. If they recognise only shortcomings in their performance, refer them to Handout 9.1 The coaching circle. Emphasise that a powerful question to ask is 'What's working?' because some of what they did *was* working.

Remind the team of their goals and ask them to write in Box 3 *only* the things which *are* working – even if the task is going nowhere. They will at least be able to say things like:

- trying hard
- want to succeed
- making suggestions.

Then move on to Box 4 'What could be working better?'. It's important to emphasise that very few things are 100% bad or useless. Even if something they are doing is only working 10%, they shouldn't dismiss it but see if they can get it to work 60% just by changing something.

Obvious examples are 'No one listens because they're all talking'. Talking suggests ideas and involvement, so to make them work better introduce a rule which says 'one talks all listen' or have a chairperson through whom all questions and comments must be directed.

Remind them of their team and personal goals and invite them to resume.

If they haven't started passing the balls, suggest that as the customer, you would really like to see at least one ball pass between them in a sequence so you can feel confident that they have the sequence and one ball right.

Continue to repeat the action-discussion-coaching circle format for another 10 minutes.

After the first coaching circle most teams progress quickly to two balls and then three. You can list everything you are happy with on the flipchart so they can measure their own progress. I sometimes wish (loudly) for someone else to keep the progress list. Once the team breaks down the exercise into obvious steps they realise the value of:

- basic team rules
- a plan of action
- progress checking – the task, the team and personal goals.

They also become impressed with their own performance. Passing three balls does take teamwork.

Once the fourth ball (the one which goes in reverse flow) is introduced, the team realises the complexity of what they are working to achieve. However, with a little practice they have that cracked and the task goal is often exceeded by up to 500%.

Celebrate their success. As the customer you should be ecstatic. There'll be a lot of positive energy in the group: I've seen Mexican waves, cheers and hugs. When successful, the team really knows they've achieved something important – both in terms of task and of teamwork.

REVIEW AND WRAP-UP

Quickly remind the participants of the task and the team goal. Use the flipchart to list their opinions on each part of the coaching circle.

- What worked?
- What could have worked better?
- What have you learned?
- What will you do next time?

You should divide their comments into team and personal sections just to focus everyone's thoughts.

Box 5, 'What have you learned?' will be more important if they are all on the same team at work, because what they learn can be agreed and taken back to the workplace for immediate implementation.

Early failures in the exercise will provide as many learning points as their late successes. Remind them that when used as a way to improve things, such failures are actually beneficial.

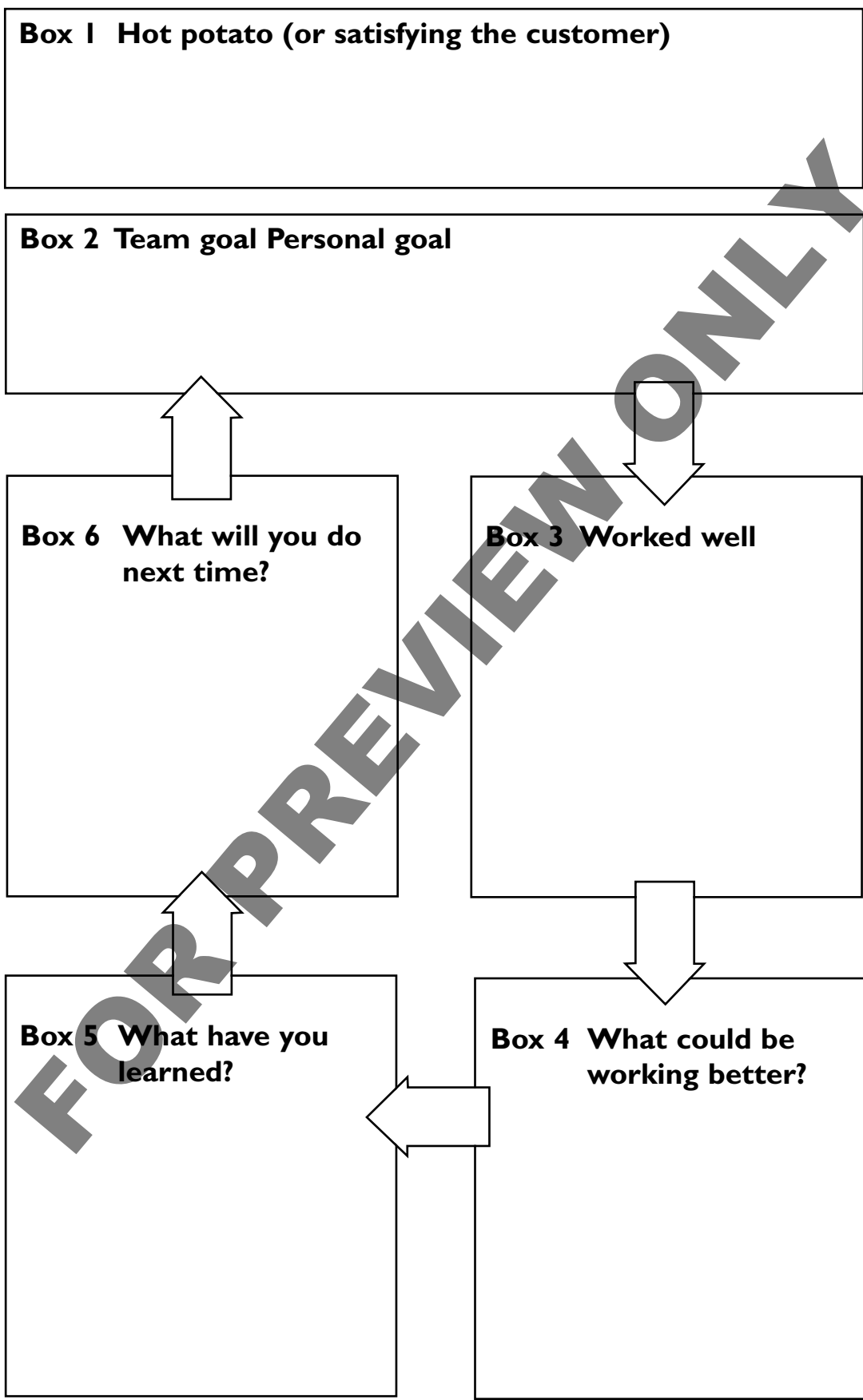
Box 6, 'What will you do next time?' can become the basis of the team's future rules, qualities and methods.

When all major points have been covered, close the session by congratulating all the participants on their achievement.

This is an excellent activity to end the day – the energy and enthusiasm it generates will carry over to the next day's training.

The coaching circle

9.1



FOR PREVIEW ONLY





Hot potato (or satisfying the customer)

9.2

THE TASK

Your goal is to: pass four balls between you in such a way that the customer sees a high quality process in action.

The rules

1. Each ball must approximately cross the centre of the team circle on each pass.
2. All balls must be continuously 'in process'.
3. All balls must follow the same sequence but with one of them going in reverse flow.
4. Everyone must be involved in passing each ball.

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Hot potato – leading the exercise

9.3



Purpose

Let's begin with its purpose. The exercise demands teamwork. A group of participants must become a team if they are to succeed. They *must* be focused, know and agree the common goal, contribute to improvement, deliver on their own personal responsibilities, and communicate effectively with their work partners.

The participants will be frustrated and confused but if they focus on becoming a high-performing team they will succeed in the task and will get a huge amount of enjoyment out of the whole thing.

The finished result

The team members will be standing in a circle, throwing and receiving balls in a set sequence. The balls will always be thrown to a partner and received from another partner (basically, they all work in threes). The balls go across the circle, not round the perimeter.

Once everyone is working well, the fourth ball going in reverse order will not be a problem. Because the team works in a circle there is no real beginning or end point – it's a continuous process and so can continue indefinitely. You should establish a goal for high quality performance, for example, in 1 or 2 full minutes.

The title 'Hot potato (or satisfying the customer)' is intentional. The object of teamwork is to achieve goals which satisfy the customer. It is too easy to get hung up on the difficulties of the job in hand and to forget about the customer. As trainer you will see the balls, especially the fourth one, being treated just like a hot potato!

The diagrams on page 9.18 show the circuit the three 'forward' and one 'reverse' balls take. Follow the arrows with your finger. You'll go round the circle touching each spot. This is the sequence each ball will follow.

Continued ...

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9-11

Hot potato – leading the exercise

... continued

9.3



You can also see a complete set of numbers to indicate the complete sequence for a circle of 13 people.

- 1 always throws a 'forward' ball to 2
- 13 always throws a 'forward' ball to 1
- 1 sees 2 and 13 as partners
- 1 always throws a 'reverse flow' ball to 13
- 13 always throws a 'reverse flow' ball to 12.

Understanding the task

Pass four balls (the three ordinary balls and the one distinct ball) between you (the whole team) in such a way that the customer (trainer) sees a high-quality process in action.

High quality means:

1. The team stands (not sits or kneels) in a circle (one circle with a diameter of about 4 metres).
2. The balls are thrown (not kicked or rolled) from one team member to the next.
3. Ideally, no one should drop a ball but if one is dropped 'high quality' means the dropped ball is retrieved quickly either by the person who dropped it or by someone close to where the ball lands – a sign of helpfulness and co-operation. The rest of the team should continue to pass the balls regardless that one has been dropped – focus on the job. Only a partner of the person retrieving a dropped ball would hold a ball until that person rejoined the circle.

In the real world work would not stop just because one person lost a report or didn't get a shipment out on time.



Hot potato – leading the exercise

... continued

9.3



4. High quality would be all the balls being passed without serious mishap for 1 or 2 minutes. In 1 minute a team of 11 people will pass the balls about three times. Once the team begins to succeed they will perform for 4 or 5 minutes, be fully focused, fairly quiet and feel really good about what they are doing.

Now let's look at the rules.

Rules

The four rules are intended to make the participants think. By deductive reasoning they will interpret each rule correctly (perhaps with input from you) and so be able to succeed in the task.

1. Each ball must approximately cross the centre of the team circle on each pass.

The balls are thrown to people standing roughly opposite each other. Handing the balls from one person to another around the perimeter of the circle is not 'high quality'.

2. All balls must be continuously 'in process'.

This prevents the team from throwing one ball round the circle, putting it down and repeating with the second, third and fourth. (That would be really low quality.)

'In process' does NOT mean in the air or in motion; it means that all balls are either being thrown, caught or held while waiting to be thrown or retrieved because one has been dropped.

3. All balls must follow the same sequence but one of them will go in reverse flow.

continued ...

9



9-13

Hot potato – leading the exercise

... continued

9.3



Each member of the team circle will operate with two others. They will always receive the tennis balls from person A and will always throw them to person B. When it comes to the ball in reverse flow, they will receive that ball from person B and throw it to person A.

The idea of working in threes is crucial to success. Someone might realise this early on but it is interesting to note that this idea is often ignored until later in the proceedings after a few 'failures' and then the group realises how good a suggestion it was.

4. Everyone must be involved in passing each ball.

The job must involve the whole team, not just three people with the rest looking on, for example.

Hints

1. The circle **MUST** have an odd number of people in it. If you have a group of 12 or 16 or 10, exclude one of them from the circle by making them your go-between – a non-playing coach, messenger or liaison officer.

Select this person because their personal goal is to communicate well or because they are the command and controller in the group or because they are the most senior – they'll learn a lot about team working if they can observe from the sidelines. Have a practical reason for the selection other than to say 'This exercise won't work with even numbers'.

2. As the customer, as well as the trainer, you can give helpful hints from the customer viewpoint. The group circle will need a diameter of about 4 metres just to give each person time to catch a ball and decide if they can throw it to their partner (or has their partner gone to retrieve a dropped ball). But you can say when the circle is about the right size 'Oh, yes. That looks like a high-quality circle, keep it about that size'.

continued ...



Hot potato – leading the exercise

... continued

9.3

When the team is throwing only one ball to begin with, the size of the circle isn't important; it becomes important with three balls, so to get it right early gives you an opportunity to give positive feedback on 'high quality', and it's one thing the team doesn't have to think about later.

3. If you have a go-between, you can tell that person what is working and what could be working better so that they can offer feedback to the team in review sessions. It will be received better than if it came from you.
4. Make notes on the flipchart – it will encourage the team to use it in their planning and review sessions.
5. Criticise team decisions before they waste time going up a blind alley. You could say 'Oh that sounds like low quality; I wouldn't like to see that'.
6. Reinforce everything effective by using 'high quality' comments – especially if the team is thinking of abandoning something which is working – 'Oh I think that what you're doing on that is very high quality; I'd like to see you continue to do that' or 'Well done, that's a high quality [action] or [statement]'.
7. If the team is spending too long standing and talking, remind them that as the customer you really would like to see them do something even if it's only throwing one ball to establish the sequence. (Because you'd like to check it off as being high quality.)
8. Ask the team to keep track of time.
9. I've never seen this exercise completed in less than 30 minutes; an hour isn't uncommon if the group has more than 11 people in it.

continued ...



9



9-15

Hot potato – leading the exercise

... continued

9.3



Critical elements

The team must do the following to succeed:

1. Have an odd number of people in the circle.
2. The circle should be about 4 metres in diameter.
3. The sequence for throwing the balls is based on partners who stand roughly opposite each other around the circle.
4. The sequence should be established early on.
5. You should reinforce that the sequence is established by requiring (as customer) that the team throws one ball round it three or four times. Once they recognise that they always receive from the same partner (person A) and throw to the same partner (person B) their confidence will grow.
6. Once one ball is 'working' the team should repeat with two balls and then three – all going in forward flow.
7. The ball which goes in reverse flow should be attempted last and on its own. The same sequence is used but each team member receives from person B and throws to person A.
8. When they've achieved this, they should repeat with one forward ball and the reverse ball, then two forward and the reverse, and finally, three forward and the reverse, unless they think they're good enough to omit some of the practises.



Hot potato – leading the exercise

... continued

9.3



Your role as customer

1. You can establish a scenario for the team, if you want. For example, you'd heard about their commitment to high-quality customer service and so you want them to produce a system that will work anywhere.
2. You're not sure what you want but you'll know it when you see it! This ensures the team develops its own solution rather than continually asking you for the answer to their problems.
3. You can divorce yourself from the mechanics of what they do by saying you're only the customer and you trust them to come up with the right way to give you the high-quality process.
4. Be positive, enthusiastic, helpful (without giving away the solution) and continually refer to high and low quality.
5. If they ignore you (customers only see the end result not the research and development), remind them that good customer care requires full customer inclusion.

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9-17

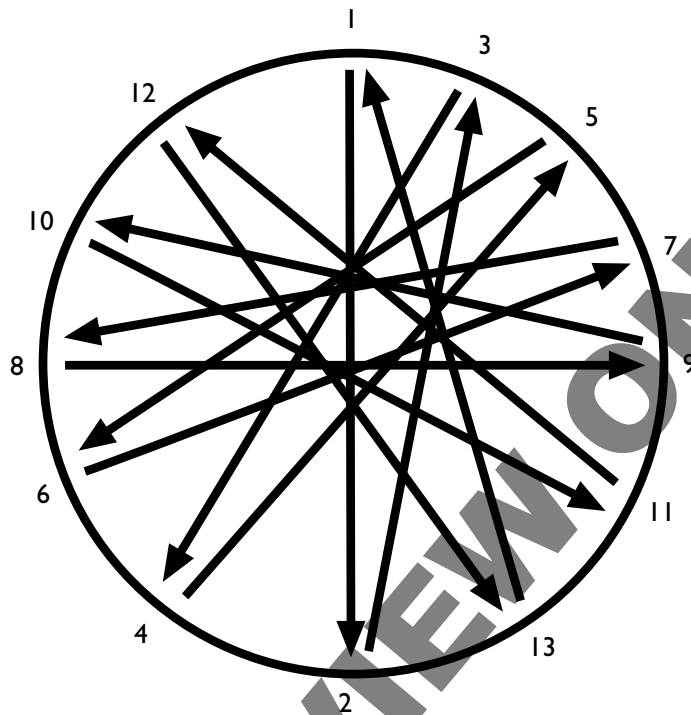
Hot potato – leading the exercise

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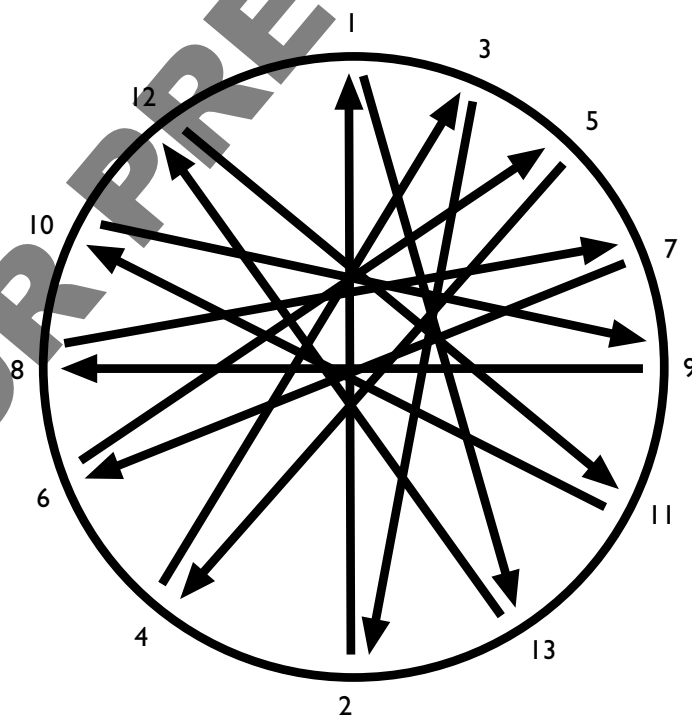
9.3



SEQUENCE FOR THE 3 'FORWARD' BALLS



SEQUENCE FOR THE REVERSE BALL



Contents

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About the author

1. Power ball

A fun and fast moving activity utilising simple coaching skills to attain higher and higher levels of achievement. The team generates its own team spirit while achieving a 'world-class' performance.

2. The coaching context

Growing oaks from acorns; this activity contrasts 'command and control' management with simple coaching techniques. In the first exercise the 'goal' is merely to get the job done; in the second, it is to achieve the goal and 'grow' the employee by allowing them to take responsibility for their own performance and channel it into improved results.

3. The coaching circle

This activity will enable participants to achieve better results in the workplace by applying a simple yet powerful coaching tool to focus on specific goal-oriented actions.

4. Coaching in action

An activity which enables each participant to be coached on an issue that's important to them, and to commit to a specific action.

It introduces the GROW sequence from the coachee's perspective to empower a performer to create a Goal from a work issue, explore the Reality of the issue, consider their Options, and then produce an action plan to find their own Way forward.

5. Using the GROW sequence to achieve goals

Participants experience the power of the GROW sequence as coaches, focusing a performer on taking that all-important first step towards achieving a goal. Coaching a partner on a work-related issue allows participants to raise their own skill levels *and* experience the results of generating responsibility in others to 'own a task and to see it through to completion'.

6. The ten questions of performance

A problem-solving activity, giving participants access to ten critical questions which expose the real seat of demotivation in a performer. Once these questions are applied to a given situation, the 'entry point' for coaching can be established.

7. Asking effective coaching questions

An opportunity for participants to enhance their coaching skills by learning to ask more effective questions. This activity utilises 'play' type exercises where participants achieve better performance as a direct result of becoming better at asking effective questions.

8. Building a better team

Team work is enhanced when the members develop agreed team qualities and work to agreed rules. This activity enables participants to use coaching techniques to set, agree and develop the framework which will lead to their becoming a better team.

9. The coaching circle and teams

This activity focuses on applying the coaching circle technique to working as a team. Participants perform a seemingly impossible task which, when done successfully, will satisfy the customer's requirements. The task can be seen as a 'hot potato' – or an opportunity to become an effective team able to deliver the required results.

10. Using GROW in team meetings

A powerful way to turn team meetings into goal-focused events. In this activity, participants use the GROW sequence to focus on creating an action plan to ensure that clear decisions are made, team members own the actions agreed, and decisions are carried through to successful completion.

11. Becoming a better leader

In this activity, participants explore the four primary qualities of leadership: vision, trust, communication and self-improvement. They then coach each other to further develop at least one of these qualities, and so improve their own leadership skills.

12. Coaching to increase sales and enhance customer service

An exciting opportunity to focus on the role of sales and customer support staff to address client goals. This activity explores how to use coaching skills in client meetings to strengthen the relationship, serve them better, and so do more business.

13. Coaching to work with the four major personality styles

'Generals', 'Socialisers', 'Team Players' and 'Detectives' all think, act and operate differently. Get on their particular wavelength and you'll build rapport quickly and work effectively. This activity explores how to do just that. It includes a set of proven responses, and a section on self-coaching to enable participants to measure how well they are responding to each personality style.

14. Coaching and project management

Keeping a project on track from start to finish is no easy feat. This activity addresses the rules the project team should work to and then uses coaching principles to define the project goal and each team member's commitment to it. Participants then really go to town on the goal – applying coaching techniques to each of the ten standard project parameters to ensure that the project goal will be achieved

15. Brainstorming

The present + outrageous ideas = the future!
Using innate creativity to look at a problem in order to consider options and find a way forward. This activity applies simple but critical 'second level' brainstorming techniques to solve problems and achieve goals.

16. Analysing complex issues

When simple coaching techniques won't do! This activity enables participants to explore reality through Force Field Analysis and fish-bone diagrams, and apply these techniques to two real-world issues.

17. Self-coaching

An activity which is directed specifically at enabling participants to use self-coaching to improve their own coaching skills. In a broader context, self-coaching is often an ideal vehicle for managers to improve any aspect of their responsibilities – especially when there is no one to turn to for a one-to-one coaching or support session.

18. How to lead a clinic session

This activity offers a method of improving skill sets through practical observation and 'on-job-discussion'. Participants work in groups of three, coaching, observing and reviewing their own and their colleagues' coaching abilities in order to achieve even more in their own coaching skill.

About this resource

This Trainer's Activity Pack has one purpose – to enable you, the trainer, to raise the coaching skills of your programme participants. The purpose of coaching is to enable a performer (the person who must perform a task) to own that task and to see it through to completion; in so doing, they become the best they can be. Isn't this the goal of all managers – to have team members who will not only see things through to completion but will also develop into the best they can become?

Coaching is very much in vogue. It is the term given to management and supervision skills by many who attempt to be good coaches. Frequently, the author has worked with managers and other trainers who began a programme 'knowing' what coaching is all about and finishing it with comments like: 'Now I can coach' or 'Coaching isn't about me (the manager) at all; it's about the person who has to own the task which needs to be done' or 'Once I'd stopped trying to get the team to find the answer I wanted them to find, I got off my agenda and got onto theirs. I stopped being stressed out and they felt in control (of what they were doing)'.

If you want to train managers, supervisors and team leaders to use 'real' coaching skills, this resource will show you how. It focuses on three major themes:

1. The generic coaching process and its basic skill sets.
2. Helping teams to develop better teamwork.
3. Applying coaching techniques to specific real-world issues.

The activities focus on different types of coaching: group, team, peer, self, colleague and leader. As a trainer, you will be able to modify the activities to suit your own style or client requirements without too much effort, while keeping the essence of the skill intact.

All these activities have been used, in some way, with clients on both sides of the Atlantic. Some activities have been generalised because this is not a client-specific pack. You will recognise some of the techniques and skills since they also belong to motivation, team building, counselling, and other areas where people-interaction is at the basis of the behaviour.

The major difference between coaching and other skills is that the coach's primary responsibility is to enable and to empower *the person who will carry out a task* to own that task and to see it through to completion.

The goal of a coach is true delegation – to be able to leave the individual or team to perform to the best of their ability, while the coach/manager is off doing something else.

Effective management and high quality performance is what this resource is all about.

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