



INTRO TO COACHING - MAPS

The landscape of Medical Affairs (MA) has always been one of constant change. Over the years, we have evolved from a support role, into a role of partnership, and now into a function of strategic leadership. With the rapid digitalization and the pace of technological advances providing a constantly shifting terrain for professional development, MA professionals and especially Medical Science Liaisons (MSLs) will have to exhibit an even more fervent dedication to professional and personal development.

More specifically, MA professionals will have to constantly adapt to provide value in partnerships with crucial internal and external stakeholders to demonstrate the realistic value of novel treatments. If they are going to achieve success in their roles today and into the future, all MA professionals will need to demonstrate new capabilities in terms of behavioral change and communications, as well as keen business leadership acumen.

In addition to the evolution of personal competencies, being able to leverage a combination of expertise and insights from cutting-edge data analytics based on Real World Evidence will be requisite to solidify the function's role as a valued strategic partner. Considering all of this, placing more focus on self-development and knowledge acquisition is imperative for medical affairs professionals of tomorrow — making proper coaching crucial for MA leaders.

Coaching and MA

For the past two decades, developmental coaching has become a highly utilized methodology across all kinds of organizations — the pharmaceutical and various other medical companies being no exception. In the beginning, coaching was used as a way to support the development of executives in key positions and it has since grown to support the development and learning for various positions within companies.

Coaching is an evolving, multifaceted, and ultimately complex activity that works differently depending on the purposes and context of the process. In many cases, it involves a “deep dive” into both the coachee's work and non-work issues and thought processes — resulting in personal and professional betterment.

The MA professionals who decide to enrich their professional lives through coaching embark on a creative and thought-provoking process; ultimately designed to inspire them to reach their true potential.

Sometimes referred to as “executive coaching”, the process involves a mentorship-like process facilitated by coach with the goal of obtaining new skills and learning – helping a professional recognize and focus on their strengths, while also properly setting goals for developmental opportunities.

Many coaches view their work as the art of professional sense-making — providing professionals with thought structure in fast-changing business environments. As industries and stakeholders evolve toward greater stakeholder engagement and collaboration, new communication models are emerging within Medical Affairs. The profession of scientific engagement is gaining sophistication each year, giving urgency to better internal collaborations between other departments and Medical Affairs.

With that in mind, coaching is precisely the results-oriented, personalized, and collaborative process needed to help MSLS and all MA professionals obtain the necessary skillset for continued professional success. Unlike some other forms of mentoring, coaching does not rely on the transfer of specific information from the coach and coachee. The process doesn’t have the form of a classroom, with easily definable units of data that the coach will present.

Instead, it’s far more personal — and while a successful MA coach must have contextual industry knowledge, the process is mostly unique for each coachee. In other words, the coach is there in a facilitative, rather than a traditional didactic role. Together, the coach and the MA professional jointly create new solutions to facilitate the latter’s skills development.

Types of Coaching

The process of coaching is simultaneously scientific and flexible — and the nimble nature of this practice allows for a wide range of definitions and differentiations. That being said, one of the most common ways to view distinct coaching practices is a goal-based approach. From that viewpoint, we can pinpoint self-management coaching, presentation skills coaching, technology coaching, etc.

In a more general sense, the taxonomy of goal-based coaching differentiates between:

- ✓ Skills Coaching
- ✓ Performance/Remedial Coaching
- ✓ Developmental Coaching.

While examining different goal-based coaching styles, we should keep in mind that this theoretical divide is not as firm as some may think. In practice, coaching engagements frequently require achieving a variety of aims. As a result, a mix of different coaching types can be required throughout the coaching engagement — or even within a single session.

Still, this taxonomy may be useful to MA professionals eager to learn about the values proper coaching can yield — which is why we’ll explore each of these coaching styles in more detail below.



Skills Coaching

This type of coaching specifically aims to improve or develop particular work-related skills. Considering this, its goals are defined by the skill requirements of particular organizations. For instance, MA professionals have always needed superb communications skills; with that in mind, questioning and active listening are crucial skills to facilitate the flow of information between stakeholders.

However, being an information conduit relies on increasingly complex data analytics, with more information available to physicians, payers, and patients than ever before. And these technologies mean that defining the specific skills needed for future development is more crucial than ever.

When it comes to coaching, the process is ideal for helping MA professionals look at this bigger picture and the long-term outlook of their profession. It provides them with a specific framework to develop skills; a framework that doesn't depend on work-related targets, but on their professional betterment.

Performance and Remedial Coaching

Naturally, setting up a roadmap for acquiring new skills isn't always the issue that coaches need to help address. There are plenty of professionals in any field that require help in meeting work-related targets — and Medical Affairs are no exception.


Unlike skills coaching, performance coaching starts from specific metrics in an organization that the professional is having trouble with — and the process attempts to alleviate their issues and help them meet the output required by their job role.

In essence, this type of coaching does not help MA professionals obtain new skills — rather, it helps them use their already obtained skills more effectively. And in the ever-shifting field of medical affairs, struggling to keep up is nothing unheard of.

But, to overcome their difficulties in meeting job goals — troubled MA professionals must work with coaches to identify environmental, behavioral, and cognitive blocks to better performance.

Depending on the level of the coachee's issues, performance-based coaching may also be “remedial” — a more punitive approach designed to change problematic behaviors or attitudes that are interfering with the performance of the coachee, as a last effort to integrate the coachee into the company with a positive outcome for all.

This remedial coaching is most commonly performance-based, but it's also where the blurred lines of the different coaching styles are most visible. In other words, a coach leading someone through a remedial process may need to use both performance and skill-based coaching approaches — along with developmental coaching methods that we'll get into below.

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Also, a coach must help differentiate the issues stopping the coachee from realizing their full potential — personality, mental, and motivational issues are one thing, while systemic issues that the company needs to address are another.

Developmental Coaching

The final type of coaching that we'll examine here is also the most complex — developmental coaching. Much like performance/remedial coaching, it aims to help a professional achieve better results in their organizational role. However, it is not designed for MA professionals that are lacking in their roles; rather, the approach is intended for professionals that are already doing great work — but have the potential to achieve more.

In other words, if remedial coaching is designed to improve a subpar performance — developmental coaching is an approach intended to make a good performance even better. This is the most complex coaching style with good reason, as it tackles both performance and skills more deeply.

The developmental coach aims to help their coachee achieve a deeper level of cognitive understanding, emotional regulation, and both personal and professional self-awareness. In turn, these fundamental changes act as a foundation for better business decision-making in the future.

This kind of approach is particularly useful for high-performing MSLs, as it focuses on helping them meet the career challenges of the future more effectively — all by achieving a deeper understanding of their peers, themselves, and the systems in which they operate. Because of the depth of this approach, it is also referred to as “transformational” coaching.

Conclusion

Coaching for MAs and MSLs stands at the crossroads of personal and professional improvement — providing professionals with the cognitive tools necessary for adapting to a fast-evolving career that entails constant change.

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