

## The Skill/Will Matrix

The skill/will matrix was introduced by Max Landsberg in his book, *The Tao of Coaching*. Since then it has been widely adopted and is a useful method of ensuring that a coach's style of interaction is matched to a coachee's readiness for a particular task. Whilst more appropriate for managers, it can also be used by both internal and external coaches with no line management responsibility for the coachee.

Coaching takes place when there is a particular situation, issue or task that the coachee needs help with. The skill/will matrix requires a coach to assess the coachee's level of skill for dealing with that situation, issue or task and also their level of will.

- Skill depends on experience, training and understanding.
- Will depends on desire to achieve, incentives, security and confidence.

The matrix works by plotting the level of the coachee's skill against their will, either high or low, in order to determine the appropriate style of interaction for the coach to adopt:

<b>High will</b>	<b>Guide</b>	<b>Delegate</b>
<b>Low will</b>	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Excite</b>
	<b>Low Skill</b>	<b>High Skill</b>

Source: Max Landsberg, *The Tao of Coaching* 2nd ed (Profile Business, 2003), p55.

When diagnosing skill and will, the coach should ensure that they are addressing the coachee's specific challenge in question. For example, 'making a presentation to the board of directors' is a specific challenge, whereas 'public speaking' is too general for effective coaching to take place.

Once the coach has identified the approach they are going to take, this should be discussed with the coachee so they know what to expect.

### **Direct (when both skill and will are low)**

When the coachee has low will and low skill, there is a need to develop both and to closely supervise the coachee. To achieve this, Landsberg recommends taking the following three actions in order:

- first, build the will
- then develop the skill
- then sustain the will

To build the will, the coach should provide the coachee with a clear briefing. The coachee should know exactly what is required of them for the particular situation or task.

It is important to identify the coachee's motivations so that the coach can tap into these. For example, if the coachee is excited about opportunities to develop their influence within their department, then the coach might highlight how success in the situation or task being coached will help them to achieve this.

Developing a vision of future performance with the coachee can often help the coach to build the will. A coachee who has a clear picture of how their future performance can be improved will be more likely to apply themselves to the situation at hand.

Once the coachee's will has been developed, the coach then needs to build their skill levels. To do this they can structure tasks for the coachee to help them to achieve quick wins, helping to develop confidence as well as skill. The main method of skill development is through training and the coach should help the coachee identify where and when they can get the appropriate training.

Once the will has been built and the skills have been developed sufficiently, the coach needs to ensure that the coachee's will is sustained. This can be achieved through the provision of timely feedback and, where appropriate, praise.

Throughout the three steps, the coach should supervise the actions of the coachee closely, providing them with clear rules and deadlines. Without this supervision and clarity there is the danger that the coachee makes errors that aren't found until it is too late.

### **Guide (when there is high will but low skill)**

When guidance is required, the coachee already has the motivation to deal with the challenge they are faced with. The main objective for the coach is, therefore, to help the coachee develop the necessary skills that the coachee requires. Once again, the key to skills development is often training and the role of the coach is to help the coachee access the training they require.

However, training does not necessarily involve the coachee going on a traditional course. Other options could include the coachee observing someone with the appropriate skills and experience, or setting the coachee a series of smaller tasks to build up their skills gradually.

When guidance is required, it is especially important that the coach ensures that the coachee has a very clear conception of what they are going to achieve, and how they are going to achieve it, early in the coaching process. This enables the coach to gradually relax control and allow the coachee to operate under lower levels of supervision as they progress.

Where possible, the coach should strive to create a risk-free environment where the coachee can safely make mistakes and learn from them. When this is not always possible then the coach can decide to offer more direction.

**Excite (when there is high skill but low will)**

This situation is an exercise in motivation. The coach has to first identify the reason for the low will. For example, the coachee may be put off by the task and require help in seeing the personal benefit in carrying it out. Alternatively, there may be some de-motivation due to the management style being adopted by the coachee's line manager (this is particularly important to identify when the manager and the coach are the same person).

Whatever the reason behind the lack of will, the role of the coach is to help the coachee to identify action(s) they can take to improve the situation for themselves.

**Delegate (when both skill and will are high)**

The role of a coach for someone whose skill and will are both high is to provide them with a sounding board and to develop their confidence to deal with the situation they are facing. The coach can help the coachee set objectives but help with the method for achieving those objectives if often not required.

The challenge for the coach in this situation is to work with the coachee to set more challenging goals and to step back and let them get on with it. Although the coachee is equipped with the necessary skills and motivation to be successful when dealing with a situation or task, the coach should still provide them with the appropriate feedback and praise.

**Conclusion**

By using the skill/will matrix, coaches can effectively prepare for a successful coaching relationship. The aim of coaching over a period of time is to increase both the coachee's skill and their will. If this is done effectively, it allows the coach to adopt progressively different styles of interaction as the coachee develops.

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*Source; NHS Scotland, The Organisational Development Toolkit.*