Training Best Practices:

TRAINING FOR COACHING AND MENTORING

Introduction

For several years, global partners and ministries of health have begun pushing for EPI managers to take a supportive supervision approach -- i.e., supervision that encourages collaboration, problem-solving, and mutual respect. In this way, supervisors take on the roles of coach and mentor rather than inspector or policeman.

Of course, not all supervisors have coaching and mentoring experience, but these particular skills can be taught and learned. Providing supervisors with training in these areas is a first step in helping them learn how to coach and mentor staff.

Supervisors at any level of the healthcare system can be a target audience for coaching and mentoring training. However, any training that involves interpersonal skills requires a thoughtful, comprehensive approach if learners are really going to change their behaviors. Remember that effective training focuses on closing the gaps between current behaviors and desired behaviors.

With that in mind, supervisors sometimes find the instruction of teaching and mentoring skills to be challenging. Supervisors may:

- Be reluctant to adopt a new approach, preferring to use traditional methods instead

- Be confused about coaching and mentoring skills with just being friendly with staff

- Lack the time or logistical support to conduct all their duties

- Not understand the benefits of using coaching and mentoring methods

- Lack the support of the EPI system to use the approach

- Lack leadership, managing, or coaching skills

- Be responsible for integrated supervision

This Best Practices document will provide strategies for conducting training on coaching and mentoring with the goal of addressing the concerns above. Specifically, we will focus on four main objectives that should structure training on this approach. By the end of such a training, learners should be able to:

1. Recognize what a coaching and mentoring approach looks like

2. Explain the impact of coaching and mentoring

3. Identify key coaching and mentoring skills and attitudes

4. Demonstrate a coaching and mentoring approach in varied situations

We will review how to address each of these objectives in your training, and sample training activities are provided to give you ideas as you develop your own training (you can use any of these or design your own activities). As you will see, the best results come when training is designed to be highly interactive and focused on practical examples and exercises.

Learning Objective #1: Recognize what coaching and mentoring look like

Traditional vs. Supportive Supervision

Learners must first understand the differences between traditional supervision, which is still widely practiced, and supportive supervision that uses mentoring and coaching.

Supportive supervision and coaching represent a two-way relationship in which both parties teach and learn together. Therefore, coaching and mentoring depends on interpersonal communication skills—skills that can be learned and improved upon.

> **A mentor** is someone who has a combination of experience, knowledge, and skills, and who answers questions, shares ideas, and helps guide someone with less experience or knowledge.
>
> **A coach** is not necessarily an expert in the staff's specialty (for example, a football coach might not be an expert in each of the player specialities), but rather someone who asks questions and poses challenges to elicit solutions and strategies, and someone who holds staff accountable to goals that will help them improve their performance.

To help learners better understand the difference between traditional and supportive supervision, training should provide opportunities to observe both styles in role-plays, videos, or other scenario-based learning. Trainers can then guide discussions that identify the characteristics of each.

Honest Self-Analysis

At the beginning of the training and throughout the course, learners should be encouraged to think honestly about their own supervisory approach and to recognize areas where they could improve in order to become more effective managers. This can be a sensitive task, and positive reinforcement from trainers, even in the form of providing examples from their own experiences, is essential.

SAMPLE TRAINING ACTIVITIES:

1. **Role-play:** Provide a guide for learners to role-play a supervisor who provides corrective feedback to a health worker during a site visit—first by using a traditional supervision approach and then a mentoring and coaching approach. Do not reveal which is which. Ask learners to identify strengths and weaknesses of each, and discuss as a group how the second reflects a coaching and mentoring style of supervision.

2. **Interactive video activity:** Show learners clips of managers using different styles with staff. Have them raise a colored card if they detect a positive, supportive style, and a different color card when they detect a more dictatorial, punative style.

3. **Individual reflection activity:** Ask learners to reflect on their own supervisory approach throughout the training. You might begin this by asking that they reflect on times when they have observed others being effective and/or poor supervisors. Then proceed with reflections on how they interact with staff. For example, do they help staff solve problems? Do they provide on-the-job training, as needed? Do they use a combination of traditional and supportive supervision methods?

Learning Objective #2: Explain the impact of coaching and mentoring

Once learners can recognize what coaching and mentoring look like, they need to understand and agree with the positive effects the approach can have when implemented in an EPI program. Training should show learners how this approach can positively affect working relationships between supervisors and staff and how it can improve both individual staff performance and program results. Understanding the value of this new approach should increase a learner's motivation to actually apply coaching and mentoring skills themselves.

For the many learners who typically use a more traditional approach, adopting a new style of supervision can be a significant—and challenging—behavior change. Address this challenge by giving learners opportunities to feel what it is like to receive mentoring and coaching. Interactive training methods, especially role-plays and scenario-based activities, can greatly help learners do this.

For some learners, the most effective motivation might be *evidence* that this approach improves performance. Provide activities that explore both qualititative and quantitative evidence that coaching and mentoring can have a positive impact on individual and program performance.

SAMPLE TRAINING ACTIVITIES:

1. **Examine the evidence:** Provide findings from studies of projects that have used a coaching and mentoring approach to describe its potential impact. If possible, look for evidence from their own country or district where coaching and mentoring has improved program outputs or outcomes. Invite learners to share their own evidence.

2. **Personal stories:** Invite people with experience in either adopting or receiving a coaching and mentoring approach to share their stories about how it changed relationships, performance, or outcomes in their program.

3. **Individual reflection activity:** Ask learners to imagine what would be different for them if they adopted a mentoring and coaching approach with all of their staff. What could the impact be on relationships with staff? On staff turnover? On workers' performance?

4. **Small group activity:** Ask learners to reflect on a supportive mentor they have had and then to share at least one way they benefited from working with this person. Each group can then share a summary of the benefits with the larger group.

5. **Role switching role-plays:** Provide scripts for role-play scenarios in which supervisors use the two different approaches to supervision. Make sure learners switch roles, so that they are each in the position of the health worker. Talk about how it felt to be supervised by someone using each approach. How could supervisory style influence a health worker's behavior?

Learning Objective #3: Identify the qualities of a good mentor or coach

Some learners mistake coaching and mentoring as simply "being nice" to staff. If so, they might feel that they are already friendly to staff and therefore don't need to make any changes in how they supervise workers. Others, however, might think they should not be friendly with staff, who might then take advantage of their perceived "softness." Either way, this mistake can lead learners to misunderstand coaching and mentoring as being about one's personality and not about trying a different philosophical approach.

With that in mind, learners need to be able to recognize that the approach is comprised of distinct and usable skills that can be learned through practice. Specific skills you can include in the training are:

•   effective interpersonal communication (active listening, constructive speaking)

•   giving positive and corrective feedback

- developing goals and managing accountability

- assessing knowledge and skill gaps

- training staff

Based on the needs of your target audience, develop lessons that teach observable behaviors that demonstrate the skills you are building. Allow time to practice as much as needed.

SAMPLE TRAINING ACTIVITIES:

- **Group activity:** Introduce key areas of mentoring and coaching, such as: how you conduct on-the-job training, the way to give feedback, and how you help staff identify and solve problems. Then ask learners to identify the specific skills or behaviors related to each area. For example, ask: "How would a coach or mentor provide feedback?" Learners might say, "Their feedback would be specific." Or, "They would give a mix of positive and critical feedback." If answers are very general, such as, "They treat people with respect," encourage them to be more specific, such as, "They are open to other people's ideas."

- **Small group activity:** Ask each learner to think of someone in their career who was a truly effective, supportive supervisor. Then jot down on sticky notes or pieces of paper some of their characteristics or actions. Share these with the group either on a wall or table, and identify the "skills" they reflect.

- **Scenario review and discussion:** Through video, writing, or live demonstration, show a scenario of a supervisor using coaching and mentoring skills during a monitoring visit to an underperforming health facility. Then facilitate a discussion about the specific skills the learners identified in the scenario.

- **Testimonials:** Through video or documents, show that staff and supervisors are still affected by successful coaching/supportive supervision relationships and still value the benefits these relationships had on their work or the program.

- **Individual reflection activity:** Start with asking learners what coaching and mentoring skills they think they already have and are using well. Next, ask learners to think about their strengths as supervisors and where there is room for improvement. Specifically, what skills would they like to improve upon or begin to use?

- **Small group activity:** Make a plan to apply your new skills. Create a list of when supervisors can apply the approach (e.g., during monitoring visits to health facilities, during monthly meetings with staff) and how they can apply the skills (e.g., by providing regular, specific feedback; by conducting on-the-job training).

Learning Objective #4: Demonstrate a coaching and mentoring approach in different situations

Next, we move from **knowing to doing.** That is, guiding learners from being able to recognize skills to starting to acquire and use those skills in their work settings.

Once learners can identify coaching and mentoring skills, give them many opportunities to practice those skills in a variety of situations. People acquire new skills – whether it is learning to swim, drive a car, or use a new computer program – through practicing, making mistakes, getting feedback on their performance, and on-going practice. The same is true for learning the skills for coaching and mentoring.

By now, it should be clear that if our goal is to help learners gain the practical, hands-on aspects of coaching and mentoring skills, training must go beyond information-sharing, such as lectures, PowerPoint presentations, and discussions.

One of the most effective methods for practicing skills is scenario-based learning. Put learners in multiple, real-world situations in which they have a chance to practice, to get feedback from trainers and colleagues, and to try again.

SAMPLE TRAINING ACTIVITIES:

- **Role-plays:** Give each learner the opportunity to participate in multiple role plays as a supervisor. Provide a few details for a situation, assign another learner to be the health worker, and let them develop the conversation on their own. (You can assign the health worker a challenging characteristic, such as being timid, defensive, or distracted.) The trainer and other learners can provide positive and constructive feedback on their performance.

- **Scenario-based writing activity:** Learners can be given written scenarios describing particular issues in a health facility they are visiting. Ask them to write out what they would say to the health worker using coaching and mentoring skills in field-based situations. Trainers can meet with learners one-on-one to review the written responses and create a discussion from answers.

- **Make a promise:** Ask learners to consider one thing they curently say or do that reflects a more traditional approach. Then have them consider one thing they could say or do more often that reflects a coaching and mentoring approach. Have them write each on a sticky note and sign it. Post and review all the "promises" with the larger group. You can greatly facilitate this application of new skills by including promises from the trainer and/ or decision-makers to follow up with the learners on their promises.

- **Face the obstacles:** Before ending the workshop, guide a discussion about obstacles or challenges that could prevent learners from using their new skills. Have them brainstorm with their peers about the challenges they will face in using these skills when they return to their workplaces and, importantly, have them create plans to overcome these challenges.

Ways to Support

We know that moving from using a traditional supervisory approach to a mentoring and coaching approach can present a major change in an individual supervisor's behavior. Such a change will take effort and time on the part of the supervisors themselves. In order to increase the likelihood that supervisors will adopt this approach once they have received training, the larger EPI program or system should support both the supervisors and the approach. Here are five ways that programs can do this:

- **Training supervisors at all levels:** Ensure that national and state/provincial officers know how to coach and mentor. If high-level officers use the traditional fault-finding, punitive supervision approach, lower-level supervisors are less likely to adopt the mentoring and coaching approach themselves.

- **Providing resources:** Training materials and job aids on coaching and mentoring techniques are useful references for supervisors as they begin to use this approach. In addition, ensure that transportation funding is available for supervisors to conduct regular visits to health facilities.

- **Developing coaching/mentoring indicators:** EPI officers at the national level should agree on a set of mentoring and coaching indicators so that they have a clear understanding of what these skills should look like. The officers can use these indicators during field visits to measure the application of these skills among front-line supervisors. Examples of indicators could include "Did the supervisor provide on-the-job training, as needed? Did they treat the staff with respect? Did they provide specific feedback in a constructive way? Did they develop an action plan with staff at the end of the visit?"

- **Providing on-going support:** Officers from the higher levels can conduct field visits to observe mentoring and provide feedback to supervisors about their use of the approach. Also, the national program can schedule meetings with EPI officers every six months to provide refresher training on mentoring and coaching techniques, highlight good practices, and discuss field challenges in implementing the approach.

- **Develop a supportive supervision plan:** Specifying the frequency, resources, feedback mechanisms that will support the desired behaviors.

Annex 1: Resources

Explore these resources for more information.

Coaching and Mentoring in EPI

In this online course, supervisors recognize and practice key coaching and mentoring skills used in supportive supervision.

[Link TK]

Mid-Level Managers Module on Supportive Supervision, Online Version

https://who-afro-mlm.com

WHO-AFRO Mid-Level Management Course for EPI Managers

Visit the African Regional Office website (www.afro.who.int/publications) for a module on Supportive Supervision in the Mid-Level Management Course for EPI Managers.

https://afro.who.int/publications/mid-level-management-course-epi-managers

You Can't Be a Great Manager If You're Not a Good Coach (*Harvard Business Review*)

Five key tips for enaging in regular coaching conversations with your team members.

https://hbr.org/2014/07/you-cant-be-a-great-manager-if-youre-not-a-good-coach