

Deliver Results- Coach for Improved Performance

Managers face many difficult challenges today. With shrinking budgets, corporate change, the pressure to increase profits, keeping employees motivated, and to retain good talent is enough to make managers have many sleepless nights. One of the most powerful ways to deal with these challenges is through coaching.

In the world of sports, athletes hire personal coaches to fine tune their skills and break through the boundaries to improve performance and achieve personal goals. In the business world, managers need solid coaching skills in order to fine tune individual employees and teams in delivering bottom line results. The Manager who is also able to “Coach” is able to make a profound difference in the performance improvement of employees while keeping them motivated.

Why does coaching work?

Coaching is a results-oriented approach. It is a completely different skill set than training, mentoring, counseling, or consulting. Coaching is goal-centered and involves a dynamic interaction between coach and coachee. During the process, performance solutions are identified and the coachee becomes committed to taking actions that allow them to move forward in achieving the ultimate goal.

Coaching has a Measurable Impact

Numerous studies have clearly shown that correctly coaching employees improves the bottom line. Organizations that have paired training with coaching are experiencing outstanding bottom line profitability. Stand alone training improves productivity by only 22.4%, while training coupled with coaching increases productivity by as much as 88%.

Benefits of Coaching:

A recent study of Fortune 500 companies showed that as a result of coaching they experienced the following improvements:

Bottom-Line Results:

- Improved Productivity 53%
- Improved Quality 48%
- Improved Customer Service 39%
- Improved Employee Retention 32%
- Cost Reductions 23%

In addition those who received coaching reported the following benefits:

- Improved Relationships with direct reports 77%
- Improved Teamwork 67%
- Improved Job Satisfaction 61%
- Conflict Reduction 52%
- Improved organizational commitment 44%

What is Coaching?

Coaching employees is a process of open communication and feedback between the coach and the coachee. This process can be time consuming; however the reward can be great. While there are very few really exceptional employees, there are many above-average performers. Your ability to inspire and coach your employees can raise the performance bar significantly. Coaching works best if the coachee is open and has a willingness to accept the advice being offered.

Six Coaching Strategies for Managers

First: Build a Foundation of Trust.

This skill is fundamental in the ability to coach effectively. If you expect your employees to respond to your feedback, and to be considered credible you must demonstrate dedication to your employees. There are many ways to build a foundation of trust; one way is to empower employees. Sometimes it is difficult for a manager to trust employees to take on difficult assignments.

Second: Clear Communication

Set clear goals and expectations. Help employees understand their job descriptions and what is expected from them. Clear goals are critical to success. Good manager-coaches empower their employees with the right tools to achieve defined goals.

- Be specific rather than general. In both positive and constructive feedback using specific examples aids an employee. For example saying “you’re not a team player” is not as useful as “in the meeting this morning, when you didn’t acknowledge you were listening to anyone’s ideas, I felt forced to accept yours.”
- Provide both positive and constructive feedback. A common mistake is to only communicate negative actions. People want to be recognized for their positive actions and accomplishments. Feedback also needs to be well timed.
- Be descriptive rather than judgmental. Using language that is evaluative increases defensiveness and decreases the ability for the employee to listen.

Third: Be a Motivator and Morale Builder

Creating a positive environment is the responsibility of every manager-coach. Motivation comes from within, however employee motivation can increase or decrease based upon the working environment.

- Good manager-coaches are able to release control and delegate responsibilities. They are able to communicate respect with all employees.
- Sponsor. A good manager-coach is also a positive and enthusiastic sponsor that enables employees to showcase their contributions.

- Establish a positive attitude. Providing praise often will enhance employees in feeling valued. Share the fame and the blame. You must be willing to share credit for victories with your team, including any tangible rewards.

Fourth: Listen

A good coach listens to what the employee is telling them. An effective coach avoids the tendency to over-talk. The manager-coach is alert to body language and non-verbal messages. Is the employee unusually silent or exhibiting avoidance? Express your concern to non-verbal messages.

- Listen for an explanation behind the verbal reaction. Often the verbal response masks the underlying problem. If you have an employee with a performance problem make an effort to find the real cause of the problem. Two good questions to ask are: What is creating the problem? What resources are needed to solve the problem?
- The secret to good active listening is the ability to use solid listening skills. These five skills include: Clarification: Clarify the feelings you have just heard, get more details and check assumptions. Encouragement: Keep the speaker talking. Perception Checking: Identify any misunderstandings. Check for accuracy and let the sender of the message know that you understand what was said. Feelings Check: Identify the feelings that you just sensed in the employee's message. Lastly, Summarize: Pull together the ideas you heard, review progress made, and sum up what was discussed.

Fifth: Ask Powerful Questions.

A good manager-coach needs to be able to ask pertinent questions that will guide the employee. Through the use of both open-ended and closed-ended questions a coach can help a coachee determine their blocks to success, what resources are needed to break through the barriers, and how to reach specific goals. One excellent resource on powerful questions can be obtained from www.pocketresource.com. This free e-book on coaching skills offers many tips and suggestions for improving performance through coaching.

Sixth: Coach According to Communication Style

An effective coach is able to adapt to the communication style of the coachee. In sports, history, and politics we have seen successful coaches and leaders that have exhibited the four basic communication styles. The ability to be flexible in your coaching style will make you an effective manager-coach.

More than two thousand years ago, Hippocrates, known as the founder of modern medicine, identified the four basic temperaments. Today personality analysis is rooted in his theories. Dr William Marston, a Harvard trained psychologist, outlined the four part system that is widely accepted and remains the base for current behaviorist thinking. Through the years, consultants have given the styles different names; however they parallel the original personality distinctions made by Hippocrates and Marston.

The Dominance communication style employee is assertive, fast paced, and results focused. To be effective with this employee, show them the simplest and quickest way to be productive. Be firm, direct, and clearly define the limits of their authority.

The Influence communication style is an employee who is fast paced, enthusiastic, and very sociable. To be effective with this employee avoid overwhelming details, and request specific feedback to check on their understanding of “how to” ... Use public praise and must provide opportunities for them to interact with others.

The Steadiness communication style employee is a moderate paced, patient and empathetic. With this employee use a step-by-step plan for development. Provide one-on-one “hands-on instruction” and regular informal feedback on improvements. Use warm and sincere statements complimenting their efforts.

Lastly, the Conscientious style employee is accuracy focused and analytical. To be effective with this employee provide specific, factual statements of what level of performance is required. Use accurate, specific statements, and check for understanding and acceptance of information. Provide them time to process the information, practice the skills and set a time limit for practicing.

Final Words

All employees need a good coach. As a coach/ manager one of your roles is to motivate your employees to work hard, perform at high levels, and enjoy their jobs. Once in a while we have the exceptional employee who outshines everyone else, and then we have the problem employee who doesn't pull their share of the load. All of your employees need personal guidance and coaching.

Deanne DeMarco, MA, RCCI, is an award winning business coach and certified coach trainer through WABC. She specializes in improving team performance, decision-making and communication skills. She is the author of several books including the forthcoming “*Speaking of Success*” (January 2007). For more information on her coach training, or keynote speaking, please visit: www.breaking-boundaries.com or call 866-91-COACH.