

LEADERSHIP COACHING

Leadership Coaching is one of the most powerful ways to help employees develop and grow. It is a unique, proactive alliance, whereby a manager orients an employee to the realities of the workplace and helps the employee remove barriers to optimum work performance.

Achieving results means helping all individuals on the team operate at the highest performance level of which they are capable of. To do this well, managers need leadership coaching skills. Effective Coaches (Managers) are developed, not born. They have over time, acquired the skills and attitudes to create an environment that nurtures learning and development.

As the business environment becomes more challenging, coaching can help to build a new foundation with employees. To be effective coaches, managers will have to learn to base their coaching relationship with employees around trust, accountability and ownership. They will have to meet employees where they are; listen more than they talk; be more patient and be willing to fine the 'coachable moments'. They need to speak candidly, but dispense their message in the right size dose. They must learn to approach resistance and reluctance to change with curiosity, and create a supportive environment for employees to grow and develop.

Coaching can positively impact performance for several reasons:

- **Trust** – In a coaching relationship, both managers and employees are open to learning and willing to admit mistakes. Team members rely on the coach to point out their errors in the spirit of positive improvement. And the coach, through observation and questioning, can help employees go beyond their prior limitations.
- **Respect** – Improvement relies on mutual respect and commitment from both employee and coach. The most successful coach knows their team members well; this insight enables them to share information, experience, and encouragement in a way that an employee can easily embrace and transform into higher performance.
- **Patience** – Patience is the glue that holds all the elements together. Coaches need patience to carefully and accurately assess their team member's ability and commitment level in order to choose the most effective coaching approach for that person.

Employees welcome coaching

Employees want to be coached. When employees are asked what contribute to extraordinary performance, they typically mention factors like: supportive management, guidance, direction, mentoring, and coaching. They want coaching that creates a productive workplace and actively contributes to their professional development. They appreciate what managers can do to launch them on a journey of self-discovery.

How to Coach?

Effective leadership coaching follows a simple four-step process.

1. Establish the real need - Often in the beginning of the coaching session, the real underlying need is not apparent to both the coach and the employee. The coach need to gain an understanding of the real problem and need. He needs to explore the current situation and the consequences of not resolving the problem and to ask questions until he can uncover the real need.

Questions you can use:

- Is something bothering you?
- What are some specifics?
- How is this affecting your performance?
- How are you handling this?

2. Setting a Coaching Contract - This may sound formal, but it is simply just asking “What kind of help would you like?” Once the coach understands the needs and the expectations, he needs to reach a mutual understanding of what the employees want. Employees are more motivated to seek coaching if they are in control of the process. Asking employees what would help and letting them drive the process and using a non-directive approach works better.

Questions you can use:

- What are your thoughts on how you can handle this?
- What do you think will work?
- How might you go about doing it?

3. Motivating Action – After identifying the need and knowing how best to coach, motivating employees to take action is often the most challenging process. This includes setting goals, generating options, removing barriers and gaining commitment to change.

Questions you can use:

What might get in the way of achieving this goal?
How is the process working for you?
Describe what a successful interaction would look like.

4. Encourage and follow-up – This involves skillfully walking employees through the plan and gaining commitment to take action. Employees usually have a clear sense of what is needed to be done.

Questions you can use:

What benefits are you getting out of all this?
How are you going to keep track of your progress?
What are you going to do before our next meeting?

Toward the end of the coaching session, the bulk of the input should come from the employee and not the coach. This “power shift” enables the employee to contribute to the team effort through his own talents and abilities.

Coaching is a continuing cycle of observation, analysis, action and evaluation. As a coach, you must provide the objective feedback that helps employees to improve or keep them on the right track.

Leadership Coaching will work if organizations care enough about professional improvement to dedicate time to it.

For more information on coaching proficiencies, coaching models, coach certification and leadership coaching skills program, please contact simonlee@nextcorpcoaching.net

Article contributed by Simon Lee – 1st VP, ICF Singapore Chapter. 18 March 2005