

Benefits & Pitfalls of Coaching Employees

Beth Agnew

Successful managers increasingly use coaching to help employees improve performance. Coaching is a better model than counseling because it presupposes that the employee is capable of making improvements. Coaching also helps maintain a good relationships between the manager and employees. However, coaching cannot be a “pure” coaching relationship when the manager has supervisory responsibilities for the employee. Still, successful coaching can result in a win/win outcome for both the employee and the company, even in a problem situation

WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching is a specialized way of communicating that keeps the conversation positive, egalitarian, and focused on a successful outcome. It is generally a question-based model that uses “charge neutral” language to encourage the discovery of potential solutions in the person being coached. It presupposes that the client has the answers and the coach is merely the person who “holds the mirror” while the client readjusts their behavior based on the truth that they now see.

In a workplace situation, coaching between managers and employees departs somewhat from this pure model yet still allows the person being coached to find solutions consistent with their values and capabilities, thus improving performance.

Coaching Instead of Counseling

Taking a coaching approach to employee performance is more effective than a counseling approach because of the way coaching supports the employee’s self-esteem. Employees already feel at a disadvantage when their performance is not up to standard. Counseling by the manager may feel like punishment or scolding, no matter how considerately the manager goes about it. Coaching, however, continually sends a message of encouragement and possibility to the employee.

BENEFITS OF COACHING

Because coaching focuses on positive specific action, it has powerful benefits in any workplace. Coaching helps develop employees’ competence and confidence; it allows easier diagnosis of performance or behavioral problems, provides a way of satisfactorily correcting those problems, and maintains the dignity of every employee. Often, a sustained coaching approach will

foster better working relationships within the group as employees begin to coach each other.

PITFALLS OF COACHING

While you can immediately begin to use some coaching methods with your employees, to achieve a good coaching style requires continual study and practice. Managers under pressure can sometimes fall back into a counseling or authoritative style, which can degrade the coaching relationship. Many of us are not accustomed to using the emotion-free language typical of coaching, and managers who have the responsibility to get an employee’s performance up to standard may feel that coaching takes too much time. Because of the supervisor/subordinate relationship managers have with employees, a true level and equal coaching stance can never fully be achieved.

EFFECTIVE COACHING IS WIN/WIN

Any attempt at coaching can be more successful than other approaches to performance improvement because it exhibits a positive management attitude toward the employee. When they feel like valuable resources who are inherently capable of achieving the desired standard, employees are more likely to prove it to be true.

REFERENCES

- (1) Cook, Marshall J. “Effective Coaching”, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY, 1999.
- (2) Hargrove, Robert A. “Masterful Coaching Fieldbook”, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco, CA, 2000.

Beth Agnew
Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology
70 The Pond Road
Toronto, ON, M3J 3M6 Canada
Beth.Agnew@senecac.on.ca
<http://www.agnewcom.com>

Beth Agnew has over 30 years’ experience in technical communication. She is a Corporate Coach University- and Coachville-trained coach. She teaches in the Technical Communication program at Seneca College, and is the STC Marketing Communication SIG Manager.