

# The Key To Effective Coaching

Business coaching has gone from fad to fundamental. Leaders and organizations have come to understand how valuable it can be, and they're adding "the ability to coach and develop others" to the ever-growing list of skills they require in all their managers. In theory, this means more employee development, more efficiently conducted. But in reality, few managers know how to make coaching work.

According to the 2010 Executive Coaching Survey, conducted by the Conference Board, 63% of organizations use some form of internal coaching, and half of the rest plan to. Yet coaching is a small part of the job description for most managers. Nearly half spend less than 10% of their time coaching others.

With such limited time devoted to coaching, organizations need to be sure their managers know how to do it right. To improve the quality and impact of your coaching efforts, start by giving your individual managers tangible information about how to coach their direct reports. Typically, managers meet their coaching obligations by giving reviews, holding occasional meetings and offering advice. For coaching to be effective, they need to understand why they are coaching and what specific actions they need to take.

Coaching focuses on helping another person learn in ways that let him or her keep growing afterward. It is based on asking rather than telling, on provoking thought rather than giving directions and on holding a person accountable for his or her goals.

Broadly speaking, the purpose is to increase effectiveness, broaden thinking, identify strengths and development needs and set and achieve challenging goals. Research from the Center for Creative Leadership has boiled down the skills managers need to coach others into five categories:

- 1) *Building the relationship.* It's easier to learn from someone you trust. Coaches must effectively establish boundaries and build trust by being clear about the learning and development objectives they set, showing good judgment, being patient and following through on any promises and agreements they make.
- 2) *Providing assessment.* Where are you now and where do you want to go? Helping others to gain self-awareness and insight is a key job for a coach. You provide timely feedback and help clarify the behaviors that an employee would like to change. Assessment often focuses on gaps or inconsistencies, on current performance vs. desired performance, words vs. actions and intention vs. impact.
- 3) *Challenging thinking and assumptions.* Thinking about thinking is an important part of the coaching process. Coaches ask open-ended questions, push for alternative solutions to problems and encourage reasonable risk-taking.
- 4) *Supporting and encouraging.* As partners in learning, coaches listen carefully, are open to the perspectives of others and allow employees to vent emotions without judgment. They encourage employees to make progress toward their goals, and they recognize their successes.
- 5) *Driving results.* What can you show for it? Effective coaching is about achieving goals. The coach helps the employee set meaningful ones and identify specific behaviors or steps for meeting them. The coach helps to clarify milestones or measures of success and holds the employee accountable for them.

You should seed your organization with coaching role models. All managers need some guidance on the whys and hows of coaching, but most organizations can't afford to train them on a large scale, so the least you can do is make an effort to create a culture of coaching. The key is to create a pool of manager-coaches who can be role models, supporters and sustainers of a coaching mindset.

When you select the right people and invest in their development and position them as coaching advocates, you plant the seeds for expanding coaching well beyond the individual manager-direct report relationship. Your role

models demonstrate effective coaching both formally and informally, and they help motivate others to use and improve their own coaching capabilities.

Always link the purpose and results of coaching to the business. Managers have to know the business case for coaching and developing others if they're to value it and use it effectively. Where is the business headed? What leadership skills are needed to get us there? How should coaches work with direct reports to provide the feedback, information and experiences they need to build those needed skills? Set strategic coaching goals, tactics and measures for the organization as well as including coaching as an individual metric.

Finally, give it time. It's not surprising that managers feel they don't have enough time for coaching. Even if you make learning and coaching explicit priorities, time is tight for everyone. But as your coaching processes and goals become more consistent and more highly valued, in-house coaching will take root. Your managers will have a new way to develop and motivate their direct reports. Individuals and groups will strive to build new skills and achieve goals. And your business will be on track to a more efficient, comprehensive system of developing people.

*Candice Frankovelgia is the coaching portfolio manager for the Center for Creative Leadership.*