

Coaching: The Key to Employee Development

Coaching is a proactive process in which one individual (frequently the leader) guides someone else (typically the employee or team) toward successfully accomplishing an assignment.

Proactive process implies that coaching is done before the fact. For example, coaching is appropriate when new or stretching assignments are delegated to someone who may not have the required knowledge, skill, or confidence. It is also useful for helping someone move good performance to an even higher level. It is typically differentiated from counseling which is a reactive process in which the employee has demonstrated performance deficiencies that must be rectified.

Guides implies that the “coach” does not provide all the answers and does not simply direct the employee in what to do and how to do it. This kind of “telling” approach is appropriate in emergencies or when the employee does not have the required knowledge. The “tell” approach does not encourage the employee to think on his or her own. Unfortunately, many supervisors and managers have become adept at the telling approach, even when it is neither required by the situation nor desired by the employee. Proper coaching encourages the employee to step out of the passive role and seek answers independently.

Successfully accomplish an assignment implies that the employee should experience success the first time and, by doing so, develop a greater sense of confidence and competence to handle future challenges. This is in contrast to the beliefs of some supervisors who subscribe to the “sink or swim” method which can give an estimate of resourcefulness, but may result in lost productivity, increased frustration, and poor employee relations.

After you have planned for the actual coaching discussion and have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish, you are ready for the face-to-face coaching discussion. This format is an effective way to structure the discussion.

STEP 1

Open the discussion and spark employee interest.

- State the purpose of the coaching discussion and what you want to accomplish.
- Discuss the benefits of learning new skills.
- Check the employee’s receptivity and discuss what he or she wants to achieve.

STEP 2

Get the employee’s views about his or her current performance/skill level.

- Ask the employee to analyze current performance and skill level.
- Probe for barriers to accomplishing the assignment.
- Ask for the employee’s ideas about how to address the barriers.

STEP 3

Give your feedback and views.

- Acknowledge and praise areas of agreement.
- Point out areas of concern and/or disagreement.
- Share your experiences and expertise.
- Suggest alternative approaches.

STEP 4**Resolve differences.**

- Discuss benefits and drawbacks of different approaches.
- Vent any interfering emotions.
- Agree on goals for future performance and begin action planning.

STEP 5**Work out details of the action plan.**

- Get the employee's commitment to the plan.
- Finalize and summarize the plan.
- Set a follow-up date.
- Express your appreciation for the employee's feedback.