

“GUIDELINES FOR COACHING EMPLOYEES”



Leslie Rose McDonald
President, Pathfinders CTS, Inc.

In order to retain employees and motivate them to their best productivity, many organizations are now recognizing the importance of managers becoming “coaches” of their employees. When asked by employees to describe the attributes of their most effective manager, they will usually describe the traits that make the best coaches.

Research has shown that employees respond more favorably in terms of productivity, team cohesiveness and ultimately retention in environments where their managers had the preferred coaching style. While this style comes more naturally to some than others, there are behaviors that can be learned and practiced for more effective relationships and outcomes.

Here are some attributes that are exhibited in today’s coaching environments:

Coaches listen more than they talk: They practice open listening techniques that allow employees to get their thoughts out without being interrupted. A coach not only is a good listener, but knows how to ask probing questions so that the employee can manage their own thought process and come to their own conclusion. When one becomes a good listener, then the stage is set for the real problems and issues to emerge, so that the root issues, not just symptoms, can be addressed.

Coaches trust and respect their employees: They trust the abilities and judgments of others, and ask for their ideas, opinions, and input. They do not just pay lip service; they genuinely appreciate and value the contributions that each person brings to their team. They do not put quick judgments on ideas. Instead they listen, and ask the employee to evaluate the pros and cons of a particular idea.

Coaches encourage a moderate level of risk-taking: Without some risk-taking in the work environment new and better ideas and solutions cannot be discovered. Fear of making mistakes must be diminished so that employees can take calculated risks, and be accountable for their judgements or actions without fear of career repercussions. This requires that the coach allow people to feel “safe” to express their ideas and take action on them. Encouraging situational judgment and taking action is also known as “empowering” your employees.

Coaches create cultures where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities: As human beings, we all make mistakes. Traditional managers blame and chastise, creating embarrassment or shame for the individual, reminding them to never do it again. A coach will help the individual evaluate a mistake and its consequences, then let them see what a better solution might be the next time. When a coach inquires “What did you learn from that situation?” he or she is allowing the person to grow. The term “learning organization” is about more than pursuing education in the traditional sense. It is also about allowing people to make some mistakes so that they will learn from them.

Coaches recognize, appreciate and value their employees: Thank you’s are given freely, as well as other forms of appreciation and recognition. Coaches do not take their employees for granted and are always cognizant of two things: 1) appreciation reinforces positive behavior, and 2) Employees who do not feel appreciated and valued have the choice to work for someone else.

Coaches are good at giving balanced feedback, both complementary and constructive. For many it is easy to give complements, or positive feedback. The challenge is also giving constructive feedback about areas that need development, which many people are uncomfortable dealing with, so they avoid it. Unrecognized, those negative behaviors can persist until they reach much more problematic proportions. Coaches know how to give respectful constructive feedback in a timely way. Interestingly people really want well-balanced feedback about themselves and are usually appreciative of even “negative” feedback if presented in a way that addresses the behavior and does not judge them as a person.

Coaches strive to grow and teach by their own example: The best way to teach positive behaviors is by modeling them in our everyday lives. Coaches strive to do this and frequently will seek out their own mentor or coach. They know that for healthy behavior, relationships and decision-making, everyone needs a place to reflect ideas and get feedback.