



## Ten Tips for Successfully Coaching Employees

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### What is Coaching?

Coaching is a partnership you form with an employee that focuses on helping them learn and develop. As the coach/manager, your objective is to guide your employee toward his or her goals. By taking a coach-approach with your employees you can improve work performance, productivity, and ultimately success in their jobs. According to *Harvard Business Review*, “Coaching is a mutual sharing of experiences and opinions to create agreed-upon outcomes”. Coaching is an ongoing process and can be used when the need or opportunity arises. It’s about helping successful people achieve results faster and easier than if they were working on their own. Although coaching is often used for high performers, struggling employees can also benefit from coaching. Good managers use coaching skills as part of their regular management style.

Studies show employees who are coached receive many benefits from the relationship including:

- Improved productivity
- Better performance
- Enhanced commitment
- Broader knowledge
- Improved working relationships

All employees can benefit from coaching, not just the rising stars or the challenging employees. The goal of coaching is to develop employees so they become more self-reliant and better able to handle problems and challenges. Coaching is also a more productive way of getting things done through people. Rather than just assigning orders and measuring progress, coaching engages employees and helps them learn in the process, enabling them to feel part of the process and become more productive.



## Ten Strategies for Successfully Coaching Your Employees to Improved Performance:

1. **Design the relationship.** As with all relationships in life, more than one person is involved in work relationships. Design the relationship with the employee and determine how you want your professional relationship to be. Here are some questions to facilitate the conversation around designing the relationship with your employee.

- How does the employee like to be managed?
- How will you as the manager provide feedback?
- What do you expect of your employee? Be clear about goals and expectations.
- What does your employee expect of you?
- How often will you meet?
- What are your goals for the coaching relationship?

These are just a few of the questions that can be used for designing the coaching relationship. Remember, designing the relationship is a two-way street. Make sure you give the employee a chance to ask questions and express what they need from the relationship.

2. **Ask powerful questions.** Asking questions opens up the lines of communication between the manager and the employee. The power of the coaching relationship requires that you engage the employee in the process. Asking questions allows the employee to express their thoughts and ideas, and makes them feel included. Powerful questions can be used in discussing professional development, creating solutions to problems, and managing performance issues. Focus on asking open-ended questions that invite the employee to explain. Don't rush to give employees the answer, coach them to think of solutions to problems. Below are just a few examples of questions that can be used in conversations with employees.

### Questions for Professional Development Conversations

- What are your career goals?
- What is your vision for your career in five years?
- What do you need from me as your manager?
- What energizes you? What work do you look forward to doing?

### Questions for Understanding

- What happened?
- What have you learned from this situation?
- How might you handle this situation differently in the future?
- How would you approach your co-worker to resolve this issue?
- What are your ideas for fixing this problem?



- What do you think?

Asking questions allows you to gather more information before taking action. For example, if you need to have a difficult conversation with an employee about performance, focus the discussion around asking questions. Gather information first and then together develop options for moving forward.

3. **Listen at all levels.** Listen at all levels, not just to the words the employee is saying. Use the skill of listening to gather information so you can assess what is going on below the surface. What is their body language telling you? What do you sense is not being said? Articulate your thoughts to the employee and follow it up with a question. For example:

“I sense that you are upset about your performance evaluation. How are you feeling?”

In addition, use active listening skills. Active listening involves focusing on the employee while he or she is talking and paraphrasing what you hear to ensure understanding. The goal of active listening is to understand the employee, not necessarily to agree with him or her.

4. **Clarify the situation.** This coaching skill is a combination of listening, asking, and reframing. At times, you may jump to conclusions about something an employee said or did without having all of the information. Using the skill of clarifying allows you as the manager to gather more information and then reframe to ensure understanding. For example, if an employee is describing a disagreement with another employee, clarifying would involve listening to what the employee is saying, asking clarifying questions, and reframing in your own words what the employee’s message is.
5. **Acknowledge the employee.** This coaching skill recognizes the inner character of the employee. When acknowledging, you are recognizing who the person is, not what they did by giving praise and compliments. Although giving praise and compliments are also good skills for managers to use, acknowledging is a deeper level of recognizing an employee’s inner character and building them up. Here are some examples:

“Jane, you really showed your commitment to this project.”

“Peter, you took a big risk with this project. That took a lot of courage.”

The intent is to support the employee and recognize him or her for taking action. Acknowledging does not mean you have to agree with the employee’s actions, it is the act of empowering the employee to keep growing and developing.



6. **Be curious.** Asking the employee questions and showing curiosity evokes personal exploration in the person. Rather than give the employee the answer, be curious to get them thinking at a deeper level. Here are some examples:

- What will finishing the report give you?
- What makes this an effective strategy for you?
- What's another choice you could make besides the two in front of you?
- How will you move forward on this project?
- How will you gain commitment from your team members?

These are just some examples of being curious that gets the employee to think more deeply about the situation. Using curiosity in place of interrogation or finger pointing engages the employee in a learning process and improves the ability for them to make their own decisions (i.e., less work for the manager!).

7. **Be authentic.** If employees feel comfortable with you as a person, they are more likely to want to work hard for you. Show employees your personality and be genuine. This is not to say there won't be situations that will require you as a manager to make tough decisions, however, the more real you are with your employees, the more they will trust you and want to build a productive relationship.

8. **Establish goals and expectations.** As a manager, it is your responsibility to communicate the organization's vision, mission, goals, and expectations to employees. Research shows that most employees do not know what is expected of them. When your employees understand the expectations and goals that you and the organization have for them, productivity increases. Hold regular meetings with your employees to establish goals, and then check in to evaluate how they are doing.

9. **Hold the employee accountable.** You've heard the phrase, "What gets measured, gets done." Coaching employees creates accountability. Using coaching sessions as a measuring tool for action means goals are more likely to be accomplished. After establishing goals and expectations with employees, follow up with them regularly to check in on progress. Depending on the skill level of the employee, helping them break larger projects into smaller, more manageable tasks may help accelerate progress. Be a resource and support for your employees so they feel comfortable coming to you and can learn in the process.

10. **Recognize and do it often.** Studies have shown that achievement and recognition are two of the biggest factors that motivate employees. When coaching employees, be sure to recognize accomplishments both big and small. In addition, recognize increased effort or improvement, even if the goal has yet to be achieved. Employees who are recognized for



good work are more satisfied with their managers and their job and perform better. In addition, research shows recognizing employees for small improvements and efforts increases the probability of the behavior continuing.

### Summary

Most managers focus on the technical side of the business and don't put as much effort into their people. Employing the above coaching techniques set the foundation for a productive and successful relationship with your employees. Coaching employees not only accelerates their development, but increases productivity.

### About the Author

Laurie Maddalena is a seasoned executive who uses her unique blend of management, organizational development, and coaching experience to assist executives and managers in reaching their highest potential. She has helped many leaders increase productivity, improve teamwork, and achieve greater success. Laurie helps her clients develop an individual strategic plan to implement changes and gain accelerated results. Before launching her coaching and consulting business, Laurie was Vice President of Human Resources and Organizational Development for a successful credit union.

Laurie earned a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree and a Master of Science degree in human resources/organizational development from The University of Maryland, University College. She also earned a Bachelor's degree in speech communication from Syracuse University. In addition, Laurie holds the designation of Professional Human Resources (PHR) from the Society of Human Resources, completed her executive coaching training through The Coaches Training Institute, and completed team and organizational coaching training through The Center for Right Relationship.

Contact Laurie to schedule a free consultation and discover how executive coaching can enable your leaders to leverage their strengths and deliver the results your organization really needs in today's challenging economic times.

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