

Coach Your Way to Success

How Coaching Can Lift Your Bottom Line and Keep Your Team Happier

By Warwick John Fahy

It's the new in-thing to be. Companies are now asking their managers to become coaches. But why has coaching become so hot? One short answer is business success. As companies expand rapidly in China, their headcount rises. At the same time, strong pressure for cost reductions come from senior leadership, who justified moving production to China on its lower cost base. One outcome is a tighter training and development budget.

Coaching is an effective learning format. Studies have shown that you'll absorb maybe 15 percent of a seminar at best, but if you combine that with coaching, it moves up to 89 or 90 percent retention because you're going to absorb what is specifically relevant to you. One-to-one coaching is specific, personal and gives immediate feedback. All key components for quick learning. A recent survey found that 66 percent of managers found that coaching had a great impact on their career success. So how is coaching adapting to China corporate life?

Are You Micro-Managing?

Does this sound familiar? A manager complains of not having enough time to complete his ever-increasing workload. Although he has the

resources to handle these projects, a further investigation reveals all. The manager is micro-managing. Common in China, a manager will keep his team on a short leash. All decision making is made by the manager, frequent reports are made to him by his team, and problems are left unsolved unless the manager gives the direction. Why?

Partially, it is culture related. Some Chinese managers are reluctant to give control to their team fearing being outshone by up and coming individuals. Confucian cultures tend to place more emphasis on respect to superiors than on respecting junior team members feelings. Practically, the manager could be quicker at decision making and problem solving and can get the job done quicker by giving direct orders. Or your manager could be a control freak who doesn't know how to delegate.

The result is a market place where a frequent complaint by western managers is that employees do not take responsibility or initiative to solve their own problems. Many employees are stuck in a "you tell me what to do" work mentality.

How Can Coaching Help?

A manager-coach who includes his team in the company vision and direction is helping them to understand that they have a role to play in the company's success. This is a significant step. Most employees work for their managers rather than their companies. By shifting the focus to the company's success, this helps the employee understand the importance of their own individual contribution. It is also a signal that the manager-coach trusts and believes in them to get the job done.

The manager-coach develops his team, rather than doing their job for them. A coaching framework involves first defining some future desired state. Then, identifying obstacles that are blocking this path. Finally, developing an action plan to resolve or avoid the obstacles.

By helping her team start to take responsibility for creating their own future, the manager-coach is freeing up her time for more strategic and value-added activities. Also, she is helping her team become more motivated and results oriented.

A key to success here is to consistently find the time to coach your team. Day to day work pressures mean many managers find reasons not to develop their team. The manager-coach will always set aside a block of time dedicated to coaching and supporting her team every one or two weeks.

Coaching Trap: Low Performers

So after the manager decides to become a manager-coach she faces some obstacles of her own. Time vampires. A manager-coach can –

with the best of intentions – still spend too much time with low performers. Like the naughty child who misbehaves to get attention, low performers revel in their manager's time without responding in kind with performance improvements.

Before investing large amounts of time with low performers, ask yourself: Is this person a right fit for the job? Are they able to react positively to performance improvements?

Focus more attention with middle performers as the greatest potential for performance gains will most likely come from them.

Is it Measurable?

Training effectiveness is notoriously hard to measure. A wise man once said that there is a risk that after you train your team they might leave. But a worse risk is that you do not train them and they stay. How can you evaluate the performance of a coach?

Jumping back to the sports industry who invented coaching, you can get some clues. Sports coaches measure and record every vital piece of information about an athlete. Using these statistics, a coach can work with the star to evaluate performance and set new benchmarks for success.

As a manager-coach, you need a few core measurement tools. Keep it simple. If you are coaching a sales person, you could use sales activity, proposals written, or effectiveness of sales calls. Have some agreed upon metrics with your 'coachee' to evaluate the outcomes. What doesn't get measured gets left undone.

We all feel the pressure of living and working in such a dynamic country. Often we expect immediate success and results. So how can we start to become a manager-coach?

How to Coach "Listen" ?

Daniel Goldman, an expert on emotional intelligence says that the key to improving relationships is better listening. He says, "Poor listening is the common cold of social intelligence."

Technology is helping us to become terrible listeners. We are constantly multi-tasking with our BlackBerry or mobile phone. We hold telephone conversations while in front of our computer. We send text messages while in meetings. All this adds up to us only paying half-attention to who we are "speaking" with.

Spend time with your team while giving them 100 percent of your attention. This small investment in your attention will pay big dividends in your understanding of your team and also how they perceive you. Most people leave a manager, not a company. A listening and considerate manager is an asset for people retention. Take a small step to becoming a manager-coach today. ●●●

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13 April - May 2007