
LET THE MANAGERS COACH

Training managers to use the coach approach is the next step for organizations embracing this concept.

By Cheryl Smith

If coaching in the workplace didn't exist, we'd need to invent it.

Think about that. Over the last decade, the way people interact with their work and their employers has altered greatly. Empowerment, continuous change, greater emphasis on leadership and teamwork, and the need for flexibility have all created a workplace where coaching is not only the smart way to manage people — it's perhaps the only way that works.

It no longer makes sense to command and control people when they themselves are responsible for their results. Nor can job-specific training and rigid procedures help people cope with shifting career requirements. A coach approach to managing in the workplace prepares people to make the most of their skills and aptitudes, to recognize the opportunities that best suit their talents, and moves them from motivation to action.

Coaching is sometimes confused with consulting. A consultant provides skills and/or resources to help the client do what they do more effectively. Conversely, manager-coaches help their direct reports acquire these assets themselves so they become better equipped, more resilient, more "employ-able." In a consulting relationship, the consultant does the work and takes responsibility for the

result: in coaching, the person being coached is responsible for their own outcomes.

Corporate Coach U defines coaching as the process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge and opportunities they need to achieve effectiveness in their commitment to themselves, the organization and their work. As such, coaching fits perfectly into the modern manager's toolkit.

The manager as coach

A prevailing myth is that workplace coaching requires a horde of external coaches or coach-consultants working alongside management. There may be situations in which this is necessary — rapid, tumultuous change, for example — but for most organizations, getting managers to incorporate coaching into their skill set is what works best. Coaching builds on traditional management skills, adding components that encourage personal growth and development, leading to breakthrough performance. It's become a core management competency in the modern organization.

Marilyn Duggan, director of human resources for Methanex Corporation, has been encouraging managers to develop coaching skills for more than four years. "I think coaching is the key to getting the best from people," she says. "Coaching helps overcome the disconnect that often happens between people."

One of the benefits of the coach approach is that managers are better equipped to delegate. Delegation through coaching is about "getting

things done through people," says Duggan. "Not telling, but helping them discover. They feel better, and you can delegate confidently—confident that they'll come back to seek support."

Coaching is also an effective tool in leadership development. Indeed, Wayne Jones, recently retired as President of Kodak subsidiary Eastman Gelatine Corporation, sees coaching as part of a leadership continuum: manager to leader to coach.

"The last 3-5 years, I really would describe myself as a coach, a leader who has become a coach," he says. I realized that great leaders don't create followers, they create better leaders."

Managers taking a coach approach are also better able to work effectively with their colleagues, thinks Mike Muldoon, former director of HRU at Abbott Laboratories.

"Once people get a taste of coaching, they really embrace the concept," says Muldoon. "They begin to realize how coaching not only helps them work more effectively with other staff, but also how it also adds a multitude of skills to their portfolio. The continuing result is that all of this feeds into our major initiative of performance excellence."

Denny Lowes is human resources manager for Mainland Engineering Corporation, a road construction company. He has spent the past year using his coaching skills wherever possible, and encouraging Mainland managers to adopt a coaching approach, reflecting a company-wide commitment to help all staff build coaching skills.

"It's been a very good experience for moving people forward, rather than giving them the answers," he says. "Before, it was just a problem that I had to solve. Now I say keep the problem and I'll give you the power to handle it. In the past it was more about me; I was happy that I'd solved their problem. Now the reward comes later, but it's more gratifying that the person found their own solution."

The City of Richmond's vision is to be the most appealing, liveable and well-managed community in the country. They have introduced coaching as part of a strategy to develop leadership skills with their management team.

According to Human Resources Manager Rae Williamson, so far Richmond has trained more than 140 managers using The Coaching Clinic, including the Fire Chief and his deputies, senior executives, managers and front line supervisors.

"We've seen a different culture emerging," says Williamson, "one that is more collaborative, where employees step forward with ideas and contributions. Our people believe they are being heard."

Libby Rush is with the B.C. Ministry of Finance's human resource services branch. "My role involves working with managers to improve their performance," says Rush. "I consider coaching to be a critical management skill. Coaching is helping managers move to a new level of competency." And why is this change necessary? "Roles are changing because we're becoming more people focused, more team oriented," says Rush. "Coaching supports collaboration — you and I working together to help you come up

with the right answer. Managers are starting to realise the value of coaching." Rush expects that over time, through adopting a simple step-by-step process, coaching will become automatic and become an unconscious competency.

"Coaching is such common sense," says Rush. "I just think it's about time"

Training managers how to coach

How do managers acquire these skills? They can learn directly from a coach-mentor or they can take a coach training course such as The Coaching Clinic (www.ccui.com). These courses are often held inside organizations, so managers can practice coaching techniques in their real world. A word of caution, though: while many managers think they do coaching already, it's not just an add-on. Coaching is a comprehensive approach to managing people and it requires a complete re-think of workplace relationships. A hands-on clinic is usually the best way to learn and practice coaching skills.

One example of a hands-on coaching workshop is Corporate Coach U's two-day Coaching Clinic. Although sometimes presented by CCU's own facilitators, the program is also designed for internal use in organizations, using CCU trained internal facilitators.

Bob Hughes is manager, leadership and coaching, with British Telecom's BT Computing Partners

"Our goal is to introduce a coaching approach to management that focuses on inspiring people to take the lead wherever they are in the organization"

"CCU's Coaching Clinic helps us shift from a traditional to a more inclusive, empowering style of management, and people are excited about it."

Abbott Laboratories has already put several hundred managers through the Coaching Clinic. Mike Muldoon was instrumental in implementing the program at Abbott.

"As I went through the Coaching Clinic, I began to realize that coach training makes an excellent tool for gaining the skills required for giving good feedback. That's another key concept in achieving performance excellence. I quickly realized we needed a coaching program like that at Abbott."

Many people find discovering the power of coaching to be a revelation, thinks Wayne Jones.

"In my 30 years in the corporate world and in my 15 years as president of the corporation, the most powerful experience I had was my formal training with Corporate Coach U in terms of growth as a leader," he says.

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Cheryl Smith, MCC, MA, is the Director of The Coaching Clinic Programs for Corporate Coach U and is an associate faculty member at Royal Roads University's masters programs in leadership. Contact: cheryl@smith.bc.ca

Portions of this article have been previously published in *PeopleTalk* and *Business Coaching Concepts*