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Helping Leaders SHINE

How coaches bring out the best
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Perspectives
on Leadership

Essential Tools for
Leadership Coaching

Developing
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Helping Leaders **SHINE**

What is leadership and how do we identify leaders? How can coaching support their development, influence and impact? What does coaching look like and how is it used vs. managing? How do we coach those in non-traditional leadership roles? What are the best tools to use to support leaders? How can we move from traditional supervision to being a coaching manager? We examine the role coaching plays on the leadership path.

Don't Confuse Coaching with Giving Feedback

Leaders must choose to develop people's minds instead of fixing them

By Marcia Reynolds, PsyD, MCC

I recently heard a speaker suggest that leaders create a coaching culture based on giving feedback. Coaching isn't about giving feedback; it's about helping people expand what they think is possible for themselves and their work. When leaders know how to give and receive coaching they are creating a very different culture than one based on making people wrong or right for what they've done.

There are common misconceptions in the workplace around the definition and value of feedback. Feedback is generally focused on finding fault. The "helpful" information you give people often raises defenses or lowers confidence, decreasing initiative and innovation.

Most people are not raised or trained to comfortably accept criticism. When people experience a threat in the form of negative feedback, they move into a defensive position. This closes instead of opens the mind to seeing situations differently.

In the article, *Find the Coaching in Criticism*, Harvard Law professors Sheila Heen and Douglas Stone found even well-intentioned opinions "...spark an emotional reaction, inject tension into the relationship, and bring communication to a halt" no matter the position or years of experience of either the leader or feedback recipient. People want to learn and grow but they also have a basic human need for acceptance. Unsolicited, one-way feedback hurts.

The Feedback Myth

The leaders I coach still tell me that people want feedback. A survey done by Korn Ferry found that people want to get better, but they don't want more feedback. They want two-way conversations that pull out their ideas and open their eyes to greater possibilities, not one-way directives focused on what they did wrong.

If you ask most employees to reflect back on a situation, they know when their behavior has not been optimal. It is more likely they need help "seeing" how to change.



If leaders started with a coaching approach instead of giving feedback, they would activate creative ways of seeing a situation instead of provoking defensiveness.

The Dark Side of Abundance

Coaching has become a popular term in organizations. Employees are asking for it. Leaders are told they must develop the competency. However, many leaders are still confused about what coaching is. They receive a one-day Leader as Coach workshop and think they have the skills they need. They practice a simple model that shows them how to apply a problem-solving approach to their conversation. Then they start their “coaching” conversations by defining the outcome they (the leader) wants. They might ask the employee to offer options but often end up telling the employee what he or she should do.

Consequently, leaders say they coach even when all they are doing is giving feedback and looking for compliance. Then they wonder why they get incremental performance improvement at best.

Leaders say they coach even when all they are doing is giving feedback and looking for compliance.

A more effective coaching approach encourages self-discovery and self-generated solutions. When leaders ask questions focused on helping employees think for themselves, they are infusing the workforce with more creative and self-sufficient thinkers. When leaders reflect and ask about beliefs, assumptions and fears around moving forward, they help the employee discover what is getting in their way of improving, which is far more useful than asking them to list options and consequences.

An inquiry-based approach more efficiently accesses long-term memory, triggering creative thoughts and insights. The leader using a coaching approach facilitates this process by using reflections and questions to help people examine their

A Coaching Approach for Leaders

Conversations that expand what people believe about themselves and the world around them lead to sustainable, positive change much more effectively than direct or 'sandwiched' feedback.

Here are five steps to follow to begin conversations from a coaching perspective:

1. Create a Safe Space

Be there in service of employees' desires and future, not just the KPI or goal you need met. Feel hopeful and caring about the human you are addressing. Be curious about their ideas, beliefs, and opinions. Don't judge. They need to feel seen, heard and respected to risk thinking and acting differently.

2. Start with Coaching

Start by asking for their perspective of the challenges they are facing. Listen and summarize their assessment of their behavior. Share what you have experienced as the impact of their behavior, both good (praise when you can) and not-so-effective, affecting the successful achievement of their own desired goals. Ask them to make suggestions for achieving a better

outcome before you offer your own. Hopefully, they will come up with their own plan, one they will more willingly commit to.

3. Stay Calm, Caring and Respectful

Don't get caught up in their reactions. Set the emotional tone and model the behavior you want from them. If you stay present, grounded, and caring they will process through their emotions. Give them a chance to learn and grow before you stop or try to save them.

4. Have them Acknowledge Insights and New Thoughts

If they say something like, "I see what you mean," or "Now I understand," ask them to articulate what they now see or what they are coming to understand.

This will help them express their new perspective, something they need to do before they create a plan of action.

5. Be Patient

Self-reflection and grasping a new way of thinking takes time. They might choose to think about their situation before setting new goals. Give them a chance to sort through what they are learning. Set regular conversations and be accessible as they work on making changes.

Instead of creating a 'feedback culture' or even a 'coaching culture' that is often misunderstood, strive to create a 'connection culture' using a coaching approach where leaders have regular conversations with employees around development, and colleagues support each other to grow.

People want two-way conversations that **pull out their ideas and open their eyes to greater possibilities, not one-way directives focused on what they did wrong.**

own thinking. This develops people's minds and their confidence. Coaching has proven to improve both productivity and satisfaction.

Of course there are times when a course correction is needed. But if the smart person you are coaching knows what to do but isn't doing it, the conversation should focus on what is stopping the person from applying what they know or from doing something different, not on giving feedback and advice.

I had a client who disrespected her peers in meetings. The leader could not get through to her with feedback and consequences even though she had asked him for a promotion. He couldn't promote her but he didn't want to lose her. I was asked to coach her. After determining if she was willing to be coached, we explored her concept of leadership and how

this conflicted or supported the responsibilities of her current role. She finally realized how being an Efficiency Expert could hurt how people perceived her as a leader. She wanted to inspire change instead of hammer people into submission. Once her perspective shifted, she knew what to do. She chose to set up one-on-one meetings with her peers to repair the relationships and find out how she could help them succeed.

Feedback pushed her to rationalize her behavior and then "pretend" to behave. Coaching helped her see she could achieve her ultimate goals in a more productive way.

Leaders who know how to give and receive coaching can create a very different culture than a feedback-based one that judges people wrong or right for what they've done.

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