

## Employee coaching: What you need to know and why?

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Employees today are eager for knowledge that goes beyond the day to day instruction. Rather than solely relying on performance reviews, managers can make use of coaching to motivate and guide employees. Done in the right way, coaching is perceived as a roadmap for success and a benefit. Done incorrectly and employees may feel rebuked, unappreciated, even punished. Many organizations have come to recognize the many purposes and benefits of coaching, others see it as a culture in which coaching behaviours are used as a means of communicating, managing and influencing others.

### What is Employee Coaching?

The Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) defines Employee coaching as ‘a training method in which a more experienced or skilled individual provides an employee with advice and guidance intended to help develop the individual's skills, performance and career.’ Unlike mentoring coaching is frequently used to assist individuals as they prepare for or move into new assignments, improve work habits, adapt to a changing environment or overcome specific obstacles. It is a process of guiding the person being coached from one level of competency to another.

According to Insala (2020), coaching and mentoring are both career development programs that are great for your employees, the differences are very important to understand:

- Length of Relationship: Coaching relationships are typically shorter
- Focus of Goals: Coaching is used to achieve very specific goals that revolve around employee productivity and performance
- Coach-Driven Relationship: It is the coach's responsibility to drive the relationship by setting tasks for the coachee to complete.
- External Coaches: Coaches are usually hired from an outside source and are not part of the organization.

According to a 2015 survey from the International Coach Federation (ICF) and the Human Capital Institute (HCI). The survey found that 51% of respondents from organizations with strong coaching cultures reported revenue above that of their industry peer group, and 62% of employees in those organizations rated themselves as highly engaged. Respondents reported business improvements in the following five areas:

- Improved team functioning.

- Increased engagement.
- Increased productivity.
- Improved employee relations.
- Faster leadership development.

## **What is the focus of employee coaching?**

Employee coaching programs holistically help employees develop their skills to become more productive and proficient in performing their tasks. It is a collaborative practice that happens between a manager and employee solely focusing on goals, room for improvements, and strategic steps to achieve success consistently. The focus of performance coaching is not to make the employee feel bad, nor is it provided to show how much the HR professional or manager knows. The goal of coaching is to work with the employee to solve performance problems and to improve the work of the employee, the team, and the department. Furthermore coaching focuses on the employees' strengths and weaknesses, their natural skillsets and personal goals, and then help provide them with a clear pathway to achieving them, as well as the company's goals, using performance data and feedback.

Managers can use performance coaching to help employees who are effective contributors improve and become even more effective contributors. The time managers spend in performance coaching with their key performing employees is time well spent. It is more likely to produce increased results for the organization and the manager's department and priorities.

Essentially, employee coaching is about helping employees understand what they are doing well and what they need to improve to advance their professional development, says Marty Smuin, chief operating officer of Weave, a business software company. "Having the ability to understand what you do well, and being able to really build on that, is a cornerstone in a lot of people's careers," he adds.

## **Benefits of Employee Coaching**

Employee coaching programs are so effective that some of the largest companies in the world have implemented them. A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual-level outcomes in an organizational context found that coaching has significant positive effects on all outcomes with effect sizes ranging from  $g = 0.43$  (coping) to  $g = 0.74$  (goal-directed self-regulation) (Theeboom, Beersma & Vianem, 2014). These findings indicate that coaching is,

overall, effective intervention in organizations.

According to Insala (*a pioneer and industry leader recognized by Global 1000 and Fortune 500 companies and associations internationally, as a leader in Career Management, Mentoring, Coaching, Career Transition, Alumni Software solutions and People Analytics*), the following are benefits of an employee coaching program:

### **1. Developing Your High Potential Employees**

Employee coaching allows an organisation to develop its high potential employees. These are the employees that you see as the future leaders of your organization. Developing these employees is crucial to maintaining your succession pipeline.

### **2. Creating a Stronger Leadership Team**

Employee coaching is not exclusive to lower-level employees. It's important that you get your leadership team involved in the coaching program to see improved employee engagement and retention. Relationships between employees and leaders can often be strained. Bad managerial relationships are often cited as the top reasons why employees leave an organization. Because employee coaching focuses on individual skills, your leaders can each develop the skills needed to effectively manage their team.

### **3. Developing communication skills**

Communication skills are vital to productivity and profitability for your organization. It's been revealed that an average of \$62.4 million per year has been lost in large companies due to poor internal communication. Employee coaching is a great way to develop communication skills across your organization. The skills needed to be a great communicator, including listening, clarity, and confidence, are easily learned through a coaching relationship.

Studies have found that organizations with strong coaching cultures have higher engagement and performance. Other benefits of coaching according to the Institute of Coaching, McLean affiliate of Harvard Medical School are:

- Empowers individuals and encourages them to take responsibility
- Improves individual performance
- Helps identify and develop high potential employees
- Helps identify both organizational and individual strengths and development opportunities
- Helps to motivate and empower individuals to excel
- Demonstrates organizational commitment to human resource development

## How to effectively coach employees?

"Coaching is not about fixing someone. It's about finding out who they are and building them up," said Heather Christie, president of Evolve Global. The majority of HR and talent leaders believe workplace coaching is critical to their businesses. The problem is that while 80% of HR/talent leaders believe coaching is a key leadership practice, only 15% believe managers in their organizations are good at it (Fine, 2020). The Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM) recommends the following tools when coaching employees:

- Using data from anonymous 360-degree surveys or climate analysis surveys to identify objective behaviours that can be linked with business outcomes. CEOs are very often shocked at the disparity in their rating and their subordinates' ratings of them. This might be the first awareness that they are out of touch.
- Using personality and behavioural assessments to diagnose which traits and behaviours are dominant or lacking, and which might be easy or difficult to change.
- Listening actively; the coach does not solve the client's problems—the client solves his or her problems.
- Helping clients distinguish what is important from what is not.
- Leading clients outside of their comfort zone.
- Acknowledging the client's accomplishments and empathizing (not sympathizing) when the client is down.
- Providing perspective based on the coach's own experiences.
- Helping the client set goals, develop an action plan for moving ahead, and anticipate and overcome potential obstacles.
- Recommending specific books or other sources of learning.
- Encouraging journaling to gain awareness of emotions and behaviours and to track progress toward goals.
- Participating in role-playing and simulations to promote skill practice.
- Meeting regularly, with on-the-job "homework" assignments between meetings.
- Managing the confidentiality of the coaching partnership. In most cases, the official client is the organization paying the coaching invoice, yet the true client is the individual being coached.

- Designing systems to track the return on investment of coaching.

After administering the necessary assessments and gathering the relevant information, it is important to develop a plan that then addresses the gaps in coaching. The best coaching plan is a plan that covers all aspects of coaching in the workplace. Depending on the coaching role and skills you are seeking, this coaching plan should meet all your needs.

According to an article in the Entrepreneur magazine, a leader can make use of the following steps when coaching employees:

- **Build a Relationship of Mutual Trust**

The foundation of any coaching relationship is rooted in the manager's day-to-day relationship with the employee. Without some degree of trust, conducting an effective coaching meeting is impossible.

- **Open the Meeting**

In opening a coaching meeting, the manager needs to clarify, in a nonevaluative, nonaccusatory way, the specific reason the meeting was arranged.

- **Get Agreement**

Probably the most critical step in the coaching meeting process is getting the employee to agree verbally that a performance issue exists. Overlooking or avoiding the performance issue because you assume the employee understands its significance is a typical mistake of managers. To persuade an employee a performance issue exists, a manager must be able to define the nature of the issue and get the employee to recognize the consequences of not changing his or her behaviour.

- **Explore Alternatives**

Next, explore ways the issue can be improved or corrected by encouraging the employee to identify alternative solutions. Avoid jumping in with your alternatives, unless the employee is

unable to think of any. Push for specific alternatives and not generalizations. You should acknowledge the employee's suggestion, discuss the benefits and drawbacks of the suggestion, ask for and offer additional suggestions, and ask the employee to explain how to resolve the issue under discussion.

- **Get a Commitment to Act**

The next step is to help the employee choose an alternative. Don't choose for the employee. To accomplish this step, the manager must be sure to get a verbal commitment from the employee regarding what action will be taken and when it will be taken. Be sure to support the employee's choice and offer praise.

- **Handle Excuses**

Employee excuses may occur at any point during the coaching meeting. To handle excuses, rephrase the point by taking a comment or statement that was perceived by the employee to be blaming or accusatory and recast it as an encouragement for the employee to examine his or her behaviour. Respond empathically to show support for the employee's situation and communicate an understanding of both the content and feeling of the employee's comment.

- **Provide Feedback**

Effective coaches understand the value and importance of giving continual performance feedback to their people, both positive and corrective. Positive feedback strengthens performance. People will naturally go the extra mile when they feel recognized and appreciated.

Before developing and implementing a coaching plan, it is important to ask yourself if your company has a work environment that welcomes coaching. Are employees encouraged to share their questions, concerns, opinions and ideas, or does your company have a management style that operates in a more autocratic, non-participatory manner?

Retaining top talent and boosting employee morale is vital to your company's success. So rather than waiting for things to go wrong, or accepting subpar performance, employees must

receive ongoing performance feedback or coaching (Maasad, 2005). In this rather challenging time of the COVID pandemic, employees need all the support they can get from their leaders.

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