

Coaching Pays Off—Learn Some Easy Tips

Robert had met his goals as a new supervisor. He thought his team was getting the job done when his manager called, asking to meet with him as soon as possible. He told him that Human Resources had two complaints about his aggressive style. One came from a direct report and the other from a fellow manager. Robert was shocked.

The meeting took place at the beginning of the year, and Robert's manager wanted to give him a fresh start. He believed Robert had the potential to manage his team and get outstanding results. He just needed support to go beyond the normal management tasks of setting goals, improving processes, measuring results, and evaluating performance. His manager offered him coaching sessions with The Consulting Team to enhance his communication skills and build better relationships with his team and peers. We coached Robert to improve his interactions with other employees. We also coached his manager in how to be more proactive so he could avoid future complaints.

Most leaders are challenged to find time to free up their overbooked schedules to build essential coaching relationships with their employees. The following coaching tips should help you overcome obstacles and make coaching a priority, so you can help everyone on your team grow professionally.

Find the time: Remember that part of a manager's job is to make regular face-to-face connections with everyone on his or her team. One-on-one meetings are a means to

motivate better performance. Just as professors plan office hours to connect with their students, managers should schedule regular time into their schedules to meet with each of their employees. You could also meet with a small group that could focus on resolving a common problem. Or you could also take them to a professional presentation or meeting.

We worked with Robert's manager to set up a schedule to meet with each of his direct reports at least once a month to talk about their personal work challenges and progress. We also helped him plan monthly team meetings that included a discussion focused on professional development, such as, giving the team information on upcoming trainings they could attend.

Use the time: Use this planned time for individual consultations. The content should be determined by job requirements or employee needs. The purpose of coaching meetings is to help employees succeed. Show them how being an effective contributor or manager includes creating trust, building collaborative relationships, and keeping open lines of communication. Share your personal success stories and find ways to inspire them.

We worked with Robert's manager, helping him realize that he could have taken the time to observe Robert's interactions before he heard that his style was too aggressive. He pledged to observe him in future team meetings and give feedback on improvements. He also agreed to suggest ways to further strengthen Robert's interpersonal skills.

Prepare for coaching meetings:

- Track employees' results and give them feedback frequently.

- Collect observations of employees as they work, in order to ascertain their skill levels. Praise improvements and provide needed training. *Robert could have benefited from a basic supervision course.*
- For each employee, jointly identify skills that need improving. *Once we started coaching Robert, he admitted that he needed help with his communication style and was open to learning new techniques.*
- Develop a coaching plan for each employee that includes resources to support improvement. *We developed a preliminary coaching plan for Robert. We also worked with his manager to create a follow-up plan for him to use to reinforce Robert's new skills and further his professional growth.*
- Follow through on the plans. Provide any needed training. Schedule manager-to-employee dialogues to discuss progress, roadblocks, and new opportunities. *We checked as needed with Robert's manager to track his progress and his ongoing coaching efforts.*

As the manager completes each of these five steps, he or she can host meaningful discussions about each employee's interests for growth. When an employee has met his or her targets, the manager may use the discussion time to explore career plans and aspirations. *We discovered that Robert planned to apply for a promotion but had no idea that he might not succeed if he continued to use his ineffective communication style. Our coaching helped prepare him to move up the ladder and his manager to support that climb.*

Hold the coaching meeting: It is important that the individual meetings are private and the coaching manager's attention is 100% on the employee. This requires that calls, emails

and texts are off limits. Discuss progress made since the last meeting. The coaching plan itself may be refreshed or changed. The coach can also allow time to listen and respond to employee successes and concerns. This is an opportunity to build solid trusting relationships.

Remember that coaching employees works best if applied universally to each person on your team. It is not a perk for favored employees or a punishment for negative behaviors. Coaching is an opportunity to improve the team, member by member.

Expected outcomes from the coaching process:

- Good relationships between manager and team
- Improved productivity for employees
- Improved morale and motivation
- Employee growth in skills, teamwork, and career

After a series of four coaching sessions, Robert showed remarkable improvement. He felt a new sense of confidence because he had developed some new skills that worked. His manager committed to continue meeting with his direct reports once a month. He had learned that even with his busy schedule the time spent had reaped good results and improved relationships on his team. Robert appreciated that the organization invested in him and, therefore, felt more valued in his job.

The Consulting Team hopes that you will carve out regular time this year to coach each of your staff so you, too, can reap these rewards.