

Taking the coach approach

My on going research on the principles of outstanding leadership has uncovered some interesting ideas on effective leadership in the 21st century. This month, we will look at some coaching techniques that you can use to motivate your team to be more productive on every level. Coaching has exploded over the last decade or so and now is a widely accepted method of assisting in the reaching of peak performance. The skills required to be an effective coach are essential for any manager to learn in order to have a happy and successful team. Let me highlight the difference between a coach and a traditional manager. A manager talks; a coach actively listens. A manager gives orders; a coach encourages the individual to meet challenges. A manager reaches corporate goals by working on people; a coach works with people. Understand the difference?

Steps to being an effective coach

- 1. Motivate your people.** You can do this by allowing them to do their job. Give them the tools required to be successful and then get out of their way!
- 2. Match the most appropriate person to the task at hand.**
- Focus on the process as well as the end result.
- 4. Ask for their opinions** – “how do you think you should handle it” may be one of the most important questions you ask an employee
- 5. Admit your mistakes,** fix them and learn from them. You are human too and those that you work with know that.
- 6. Operate an open door policy.** Having said that, you will need time not to be disturbed whilst you think, plan, strategise and get stuff done. When your door is open and a staff member pops in, make sure you are “in the moment”. That is, actively listen to what is being said to you. Ask follow up questions to ensure that you fully understand what is being said to you. More importantly though manage by walking around. Let your people see that you are accessible – encourage their work efforts and stop for a chat. Remember to focus on the moment.
- 7. Be an excellent listener.** Do you know the difference between hearing; listening and actively listening? Actively listening is when you focus on what is being said to

you. Other thoughts are pushed from your mind and you are listening and watching. Active listeners don't ignore emotions either. Remember that God gave you 2 ears and 1 mouth for a reason!

- 8. Ask quality questions.** Great coaches know the power of when to use open ended or closed questions. Be clear and concise in your communication and leave emotion out.

Coaching encourages one on one interaction. For the communication to be effective you will need to have a clear purpose. If your employee initiates the conversation then let him or her set the agenda. If the conversation is initiated by you then be clear about what you seek to accomplish in the time allocated. Establish the ground rules – will the conversation take 10 minutes or an hour? Are you speaking as a manager or as a “friend”?

Finally, stay focussed – utilise the skills of actively listening.

The importance of language

NLP masters (Neuro-linguistic programming) highlight the importance of language. People hear using all of their senses. Is the person you are communicating with a visual (can you see what I am saying?) or audio (can you hear where I am coming from?) or feeling (how do you feel about what I am saying?) By communicating in a way that the other person feels comfortable with you will have congruence and a quick result.

How you say something can sometimes be more important than what you say. Avoid inflated verbs like “always” and “never” – these words increase the emotion in any statement. Eg. You are always late to meetings or You never turn up on time to work are probably overstatements and will elicit an aggressive or confrontational response.

Another important skill you will need to learn to be an effective coach is to celebrate the differences between your people. I have worked under many managers in my time that have approached management from the perspective of “it's my way or the highway”. This is an outdated management technique. Coaching encourages the setting of clear goals and coaching for results – not controlling activities to get the results. In fact the better manager/coach you are, the less control you need over your workers.

Coaches **empower** others to achieve their potential. Your job is to provide knowledge, information, but most of all trust. Focus on solving problems together. The most constructive way to do this is to present the problem in a clear concise manner and then create as many possibilities for solutions as your team can, without focussing on a single solution. Separate the personality from the solution and resist the temptation to assign the person who can up with the suggestion the task of carrying it out.

If you are ever in the position of having to deliver bad news, make sure you do it personally. Most of us want others to like us and we certainly aren't very likeable when we are delivering bad news. By taking the coach approach, you can deliver bad news without emotion but with empathy. Offer reasons for the decision and avoid taking the therapists approach – remember that you are coaching performance NOT personality. If at all possible offer options for improvement but don't end the session until the person is clear on what your expectations are and what must be done next to rectify the situation.

Finally, effective coaches will always stress the positive and provide positive feedback regularly both individually and within the group. We all respond well to positive praise. Go into bat for them with your superiors. Remember that as their coach, you are a vital link. Savour their achievements without taking any of the credit away from them. Being a coach is sometimes a thankless job, however you will be rewarded with their peak performance and longevity and loyalty to the role. ■



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