

MANAGER ROLES: THE COACH

By Dan McGraw

The most effective managers assume many roles based on the situation and the needs of the organization. Whether it's manager, leader, mentor or coach, these roles and their respective skills can be learned, practiced and mastered. The role of the coach is one of the most powerful, yet it is among the least used, primarily because it is misunderstood and requires a skill many are reluctant to apply.

Big picture: individuals grow in organizations through experience, fueled by abilities and training. While most of us are aware of our behavior, we sometimes have blind spots, things that others see but we don't. This often has an unintended impact on our performance, our teams, our results. This is where coaching comes into play, so to speak.

Why does coaching matter to the organization? Quite simply, it develops leaders, improves retention, and enhances current performance. How about the employee? Coaching leverages the employees desire to excel. It improves their skills and chance for promotion, increasing their satisfaction in their job and builds trust with their manager. What's in it for the coach? It provides rewards inherent in helping others grow plus it prepares the successor, improving the coach's promotional opportunities.

What is the coach's goal? **Success of the employee.** With the advice and counsel of the coach, the employee defines success.

What's required for a successful coaching relationship? You must **identify the coaching needs** of the employee. What skill must they learn? What behavior must they change or strengthen? What strength might they exploit? This requires **observation** of performance and behavior on the coach's part. It can't be done by hearsay. And finally, the common "dominator" is **trust**. The employee must know that you, the coach, have their best interests at heart. Unequivocally.

We know coaching is often about fundamentals. The "Coaching Fundamentals" involves practices and methods that can be learned. The *objective* must be clear to both parties. Listening is more important than talking. Coaches don't provide answers so much as they ask questions. Coaching means giving critical feedback that isn't *personally* critical. The feedback must be invited, welcomed. Coaching isn't for everybody. Why? For some employees, success has been achieved: they're doing ok. These you manage and lead. Period. Finally. Skills and behavior are coachable. Innate characteristics such as creativity, independence, ambition, and competitiveness are not.

The Three Coaching Steps

1 - **Awareness** - the coach lets the employee know they have a need for coaching. This involves defining coaching, explaining the "blind spot" concept, and assessing the specific need. Here the first tool of the coach is used: **feedback**. This creates the awareness, focus and loyalty mandatory for the coaching relationship.

Sometimes feedback is avoided because of the fear and uncertainty of confrontation. Learning the steps for effective feedback ensures success and effectiveness. Two of the most important: picking the right time and place and getting the employee's implicit permission. Your style during the feedback is crucial. It must be straightforward and delivered in a caring way, with interest and empathy.

Coaching Step # 2 - **Acceptance** - the employee agrees on the impact of their behavior or performance.

How the coach achieves acceptance:

1. Describe the impact of the behavior
2. Acknowledge it may not have been the intention
3. Show interest in their situation
4. Ask if they want your help
5. Align the change with the employee's motivation.
 - a. Recognition
 - b. Achievement
 - c. Affiliation
 - d. Power

Appreciate that sometimes what they say may not represent their actual motivation.

3 - **Action** – the employee is willing to act to make a change with the coach's help.

1. The employee identifies the skill or behavior they'll improve or change and the impact of the change. They consider the consequences of not changing.
2. The employee defines the goal, writes it down and visualizes the future.
3. The coach and employee explore what to do to get different results.

During this action step, the coach uses the other three coaching tools:

- **sharing experience**
- **offering advice**
- **asking questions...both easy and tough**

Notice the tool's connote helper, partner, the two of us.

These tools, along with **giving feedback**, provide the ongoing value in the coaching process. This allows the employee to discover and own their plan of action and achieve the results they seek: success. As the coach, pay special attention to balancing your use of the four tools, i.e. avoid using the one or two you're most comfortable with.

4. The employee takes responsibility and executes the plan.
5. The coach and employee assess what's working and what's not, and take appropriate action, repeating 3, 4, and 5 as needed.
6. They celebrate success, a key step!

Best Coach - Think about the worst coach you've ever had. What did they do, or fail to do, that earned them that distinction? Now, think about the best coach you've ever had. What did they do that made them "your best?" Chances are, they practiced what we've described above. **They cared.** What's the lesson here? Go and do likewise.

Afterthought - Coaching as described here is not limited to the manager/employee relationship. It can be employee/boss, peer-to-peer, player-to-player, wife-to-husband, father-to-son, friend-to-friend... you get the picture. The key concept prevails -- establish trust and ask permission.

Dan McGraw, a management consultant, works with businesses of all types and sizes, coaching managers, changing organizational culture and conducting workshops. The development workshops focus on new insights and taking appropriate action. Many find the experience life changing. This article is based on his workshop "Coaching for Greatness: The Two of Us." Dan lives in Seattle, Washington.