How to Coach Your Employees for Success
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Abstract:
Executive and management coaching has increased in popularity in recent years. Coaching’s success has lead managers to utilize coaching for Performance Improvement of employees. This article explains how to delineate your manager role from the role of a coach, discusses common pitfalls, and takes you through a step-by-step process so you can begin coaching your employees for career and organizational success.

Is Coaching the New Management?
World-class athletes, public performers, and winners in nearly every profession, know that without the right coach, they won't perform at their peak. In recent years, this thinking has extended to the work place. Executive and management coaching has increased in popularity in the business world, with many prestigious companies implementing coaching programs for their executives, managers, and employees. In a survey by Right Management Consultants [found], 86 percent of companies said they used coaching to sharpen the skills of individuals who have been identified as future organizational leaders. (Michelman, 2005). Since high performance is essential to the maintenance of a successful career, companies who want to maximize the investment they make in people are choosing to engage in performance coaching.

How do I Start Coaching my Employees for Success?
Due to the success of executive coaching, many managers are now coaching employees for Performance Improvement (PI). Coaching can also be a very effective tool for motivation, participation, and leadership development. So, how can you use coaching for PI, staff development, and ultimately organizational success?

Know Your Role:
When engaging in coaching, employees should first understand the importance of their role and seek to clarify it. Although there are many similarities, a boss, a coach, and a boss coaching employees all have distinctly different roles:

The Boss = Sponsor-Mandates goals and holds others accountable for results (internal to organization).

The Coach = Change Agent-Helps people increase their skills to achieve the results (typically external to organization).

The Boss-Coach = Both Mandates the goals and acts as change agent to help people develop the ability to accomplish these goals (internal to organization).
**Beware Common Pitfalls of the Boss-Coach:**
There are some common pitfalls of the dual Boss-Coach role which include some of the following:

- Not making expectations clear;
- Pretending not to have expectations;
- Soft pedaling bottom line expectations;
- Thinking that coaching is a substitute for performance management;
- Thinking coaching is directive or telling employees what to do.

**Know the Two Important Tasks When Coaching:**
According to Mary Beth O’Neil, author of *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart* (2000), there are separate and sequential tasks a Boss-Coach needs to accomplish with any employee:

**Task 1:** Name performance expectations and ensure employee commitment to them.
Clear expectations should be behaviorally specific. i.e. what, by whom, and when.

**Task 2:** Coach and develop employees to accomplish expectations. Once you have clarified expectations offer coaching as a way to accomplish them. Offering coaching as an option puts the employee’s motivation where it belongs, with her.

**Keep These 5 Important Coaching Actions in Mind:**

1. **Question.** Quite often performance problems stem from employee's not knowing what is expected or perhaps from having picked up a wrong idea about how to handle a task from a misinformed co-worker. Begin by questioning the employee to make sure that he or she understands what you expect and how he or she is not meeting that expectation.

2. **Listen.** Take the time to ensure that the employee's concerns and challenges have been correctly understood. There may be factors you are not aware of that are making a task difficult or impossible. Perhaps another department is slowing things down, or perhaps a new supplier's product does not handle the task as easily as the old one did.

3. **Affirm.** Show respect for the employee's feelings and point of view. Involving the employee and valuing his or her input are essential to getting "buy-in." That's the key to sustained top-level performance in the future.

4. **Clarify.** Work interactively with the employee to identify the true nature of the problem, and seek possible solutions. Dig down to clarify exactly what has to change, and what the outcomes must be.
5. Solve. Collaboratively develop a plan for how to manage the task better. When you come up with the solution together, it's most likely to be a practical one that the employee can understand and embrace.

Once you understand the fundamentals of good coaching, are aware of the common pitfalls, and have the preceding coaching actions in mind, you are ready to start coaching using the four steps below.

**Four Steps to Coaching Employees for Success:**
Once an employee commits to coaching, the Boss-Coach can then engage in the following steps to coaching employees for success

**Step I- Contracting:**
Partner with the employee, familiarize yourself with his or her challenges, test employee’s ability to own his or her part of the issue and start giving immediate feedback. Establish a contract that outlines specific content, duration of coaching, sequence of meetings, goals, and how they will be measured. Specify expectations of both parties i.e. reporting hierarchies.

**Step II- Action Planning:**
During this phase move the employee to specifics. Help identify his or her side of the pattern and steps that he or she needs to take to improve his or her performance. Once a contract has been established, plan specifically how it will be executed. With the employee, create specific action items with due dates.

**Step III- Coaching Sessions:**
Meet with the employee on a regular basis (once a week is recommended) to ensure that the plan is being followed and to help keep the employee on track. I recommend *Live-Action coaching*, which allows you to observe a coachee in live action with his or her colleagues and provide immediate feedback.

As a manager you possess a unique advantage because you are already internal and in a position to observe. Live-Action coaching may also entail giving an employee feedback on an interaction you are having with him or her. Assume that how employees interact with you carries over to other working relationships so who better to give them feedback than someone who is being affected by his or her behavior.

When engaging in Live-Action coaching ensure the structure of the sessions, follow the coachee’s goals, foster breaking maladaptive patterns, and maintain alignment in the organizational system by honoring the coachee’s role as well as your own role in this system.
Step IV- Debriefing:
After the agreed upon coaching contract has been fulfilled you must debrief with your employee regarding the process of coaching. Assess whether or not coaching was effective, i.e. were the goals met? Set a tone of openness by soliciting and be open to feedback on your performance first. Discuss the employee’s strengths and challenges. Identify key recurring patterns, assess the alignment of roles, and plan the employee’s next steps.

When coaching employees keep in mind some of the characteristics that make good coaching more effective:

- Involves personal, one-on-one training or teaching;
- Usually results from direct observation of behavior or specific facts;
- Can be targeted to a specific task or assignment;
- Is interactive;
- Suggests a concerned, friendly, caring interest;
- Offers encouragement and support;
- Doesn't rush to judgment or criticism.

Remember, if you clarify your role, avoid the pitfalls of having a dual role, know the two important tasks when coaching, keep the four important coaching actions in mind and follow the preceding five steps, you will be on the road to successful employee coaching.

- For a more in depth discussion of Live-Action Coaching you may want to pick up *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart* (O’Neal, 2000).
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Dr. Nicole Cutts is an author, speaker, organizational consultant, success coach, and licensed Clinical Psychologist. She earned her doctorate at the California School of Professional Psychology- LA, where her emphasis of study was Multicultural Community Clinical Psychology and a B.S. in Psychology from Howard University.

She has been a contributing writer for Identity Television, and The Diversity Channel, where she was also the Senior Features Editor. She has appeared on BET, Roland S. Martin’s Urban Business Roundtable, the BBC, and various radio programs. Her writings on Corporate Wellness, Success Coaching, and Diversity appear on several business websites. She is a former faculty member in the Women’s Studies’ Department at The University of MD-Baltimore County. She also sits on the D.C. Bar Association Lawyer’s Counseling Committee and the board of The Student Support Center. Dr. Cutts is the CEO of Cutts Consulting, LLC and Vision Quest Retreats through which she delivers organizational and professional development training and coaching.

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