

Boot Camp for New (and lightly-trained) Supervisors Week 5, Day 1: Coaching Employees

A coach is someone who helps another person reach higher levels of effectiveness by creating dialogue that leads to awareness and action. Let's look at that definition piece by piece. It holds some valuable information on the process and goals of coaching.

A coach is someone—a coach is a person. At work, supervisors are coaches. When we are coaching, it's important to keep the next part of the definition in mind: **who helps another person.** When we are coaching, our intent is to help. We must go into every coaching session with a positive attitude of helpfulness. We are helping our employees create success for themselves and the organization. We are only successful if our employees are successful.

Specifically, we create success for our employees by helping them **reach higher levels of effectiveness.** It's a great goal. We aren't trying to make them perfect or get them to change for change's sake. Our goal is to help them be more effective which could mean more efficient or more productive. It could mean helping them create better relationships so they can be more effective. When we are effective, we are having an impact, and that's what we want for our employees.

We help them become more effective **by creating dialogue.** We don't go into a coaching session and tell our employees what they need to do. That's not coaching; that's delegating. In coaching we will discuss expectations, obstacles, and needed resources. We will ask questions so that we fully understand our employees' perspectives. One of the most important things to keep in mind is that coaching is a conversation, not a lecture. The employee will have many of the best solutions.

The dialogue that includes listening, sharing, and asking questions **leads to awareness and action.** The process of exploring possibilities is part of the Discussion Process. In the Listen and Share stage, the goal is to raise everyone's awareness of what is important and possible around a topic. After we have discussed the coaching issue together, we will come up with actions together. We want employees to come up with the actions as much as possible.

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Let's move on to the Coaching handout. Before a coaching session begins, it's important to have the desired outcome in mind. The outcome is not the details of how something is going to be done. It's the end result. For example, one desired outcome might be that an employee consistently submits a weekly report on time. That's a good outcome. How the employee will accomplish that goal is something that will be determined during the coaching session. We might have some ideas about what would be useful or efficient, but those aren't outcomes. Our ideas are something to share during the discussion, but not outcomes we hold from the start.

One way to check the validity of an outcome is to compare it to organizational goals. Will the organization benefit if the employee achieves the desired outcome? Another consideration is: Does the organization require this outcome? Sometimes supervisors believe something should be done a certain way, but it's not actually required by the organization. For example, some supervisors hold standards for appearance that are above those required by the organization. Supervisors can only require outcomes in alignment with organizational goals and requirements. During the coaching session, it's important to make sure that the employee understands the link between the outcome they are being asked to create and organizational goals and expectations.

The importance of clear performance standards is something that we've discussed several times. In a coaching session, it could be a reminder of task requirements or the delegation of a new task. Supervisors must ensure that the standards are clear and that the employee agrees to those standards, especially if it's above the minimum standard. Minimum requirements are outlined in job descriptions and meeting those requirements is acceptable performance. Supervisors sometimes have a difficult time accepting that performance that meets a minimum standard is adequate. However, we hire employees to do a certain job. They agree to perform that job and those tasks. We can ask and encourage higher performance, but we cannot take punitive action if they are meeting the standard.

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There are three types of coaching: Coaching for Improvement, Coaching for Success, and Counseling. Coaching for Improvement is helping someone who is below standard to improve and meet the standard. Coaching for Success is more fun for supervisors. It's helping someone achieve more than the minimum. Usually, the employee is motivated and open to professional growth. The last type of coaching is Counseling, and it is done according to your organization's procedures for punitive actions. We begin counseling when we believe that the employee will not benefit from further Coaching for Improvement. It is very important to coordinate with your Human Resources department to ensure you comply with all guidelines and regulations.

Supervisors sometimes feel bad about beginning the process to let someone go. However, if we keep someone in a situation where they are failing, we aren't helping them. It's better to let them find a different situation where they can be successful. For some reason this person is not a good fit with the job and/or the organization. It's best for all concerned if the employee moves on to find success elsewhere.

During coaching, there are three areas to investigate: Resources and Obstacles, Ability, and Attitude. A supervisor is responsible for providing resources and removing obstacles. It's good to check during the coaching session to be sure that those two things are not part of the challenge. If they are, then providing the resource or removing the obstacle goes on the supervisor's To Do list.

The second area to explore is Ability. If ability is the issue, that is to say the employee cannot perform the required tasks at an acceptable level, we want to figure out why. Perhaps they didn't receive training or the training was incomplete or too fast. Maybe the employee isn't suited for this particular task. For example, the task requires great attention to detail and the employee struggles with small details. Some causes we can deal with as supervisors and some we cannot, but it's important to identify how much ability is causing the challenge.

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The last area to explore is Attitude, and in leadership workshops it is the area that supervisors complain about most often. Coaching someone around a poor attitude is a little tricky. We don't want to coach on the attitude itself because it's easy for employees to deny having a bad attitude. We want to coach them on the behaviors that lead us to believe that they have a bad attitude. For example, if someone rolls their eyes in a meeting, that is a form of sarcastic communication that we can coach someone about. We can also coach employees about their inability to get along with others because of a poor attitude as long as we have specific examples of the behavior documented. Those types of behaviors are affecting morale and getting in the way of efficiency and productivity.