

Coaching – It's Not Just for Athletes

If you're under the impression that coaching addresses only deficiencies, think about the world of professional sports. Even the athletes making millions of dollars have coaches—not because they don't know what to do, but because coaches help raise awareness of strengths and challenges, offer different perspectives, challenge assumptions, and push personal accountability.

Developmental coaching is future-focused, with the purpose of building competencies for current and future roles and responsibilities. Developmental coaching involves a powerful, structured, one-on-one relationship that is used to prepare high potential employees for senior leadership positions, guide executives to overcome career-limiting behaviors, accelerate a new manager's assimilation, or build bench strength for critical positions.

Studies by the Human Capital Institute (HCI) and the International Coach Federation (ICF) found that companies that had strong coaching cultures allocated resources to coaching in the form of budget and time. These organizations engage experienced, trained, external coaches, provide training for their internal coaches, and give their managers training in the skills needed to conduct effective coaching conversations.

Research shows that coaching leads to a number of benefits. Most significantly, a strong coaching culture is correlated with higher employee engagement and stronger financial performance. In addition, organizations that use coaching effectively find that they're able to onboard new employees more efficiently, develop leaders more quickly, and improve team functioning.

Coaches from outside your organization can bring credibility, different perspectives, and varied experiences to their coaching engagements. These characteristics are particularly important for senior level leaders for whom external coaches are often used.

Senior level leaders are still frequent recipients of coaching, but in addition, we see coaching used as a strategy for leadership development for frontline and mid-level managers, often in combination with structured training programs. High potential employees are offered coaching to prepare for leadership roles or as part of succession planning. Frequently, developmental goals relate to communication effectiveness, leadership presence, and team effectiveness.

Here are four key steps for building a coaching culture in your organization:

1. **Link coaching to business objectives.** Make sure your coaching objectives are aligned with your strategic plan.
2. **Get the support of leaders.** Your leaders can help make a paradigm shift from the notion that coaching is for correcting defects, to the idea that coaching is an investment in the long-term development of employees.
3. **Identify, recognize, and reward coaching behaviors** within the context of existing formal and informal recognition programs.
4. **Tie coaching to all talent initiatives,** including competency building, employee learning and development, leadership development, performance management, and succession planning.

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There was a time when coaching was an activity that suggested a leader had significant problems to correct. Fortunately, this isn't the case anymore. Help your leaders to recognize the value of coaching, and make it an important part of your organization's employee development initiatives.

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