



## Developing the Coaching Skills of Managers for Organizational Impact

**Coaching in organizations has primarily been focused on developing leadership strengths at the executive and senior levels. Now the focus has shifted to developing managers at all levels of the organization as coaches support their employees during constant change and in their career goals.**

Leadership coaching has successfully enabled many executive and senior leaders to identify their weaknesses and leverage their strengths to become more effective decision-makers in their respective organizations. In the past few years, the success of coaching and the need to develop a high-performing workforce that can successfully adapt to change with resiliency and flexibility have led some organizations to focus on developing a coaching culture.

This strategy requires managers at all levels of the organization to act as coaches to their employees, guiding them to become effective in their work environment through successful interactions with coworkers, managers and customers. Emerging from the newest trend in coaching is a variety of initiatives to drive coaching skills across the enterprise and down through the management levels.

### Holding Conversations

For many years, a coaching culture has been defined by three elements. The first is the acceptance of coaching as a tool for developing leaders. The second element is that leaders use their coaching skills to develop employees. The third is employees at all levels use coaching behaviors during their interactions with other people in the work environment.

External coaches have successfully developed the skills of high-level leaders, but developing a coaching culture is far more pervasive and more suitable for today's ever-changing business environment. Managers as coaches help employees perform at their highest level and progress.

Research has shown that the most effective managers coach their employees. Many managers do not have natural coaching skills which require specific and effective communication. They must learn how to do things like hold coaching conversations about what an employee views as meaningful work, career goals and professional development aspirations.

Coaching managers are skilled at giving and receiving real-time feedback, active listening, asking open-ended questions rather than providing advice, and encouraging employees to follow their learning paths and providing the necessary resources. The manager encourages people to interact with each other to promote teamwork and solicits ideas, acting on the best ones.



The manager as coach builds employee accountability into the coaching process to ensure invested time and resources bring results when meeting the employee's preferences for work and development opportunities.

### Coaching is Really About Employee Empowerment

Millennials, in particular, expect their managers to help them access development opportunities with meaning. Employees want to be empowered and not managed. The specific process for developing managers as coaches is unique to each company, though the principles of coaching are the same.

Pandora uses online, on-demand learning and development training tools that were developed in-house. This ensures the content reflected the company's values and culture. Managers are required to take the courses because the company is committed to offering ongoing mentoring and coaching to all employees, in addition to learning and experiential development opportunities.

Some companies place coaching at the heart of other initiatives. For example, GlaxoSmithKline developed the "Accelerating Difference" program with a goal to promote more women into senior management levels by using coaching, dialogues and sponsorship. Coaching promotes a diverse and inclusive workplace because it gives all people a voice and attention, both of which are empowering. GlaxoSmithKline has experienced important results that include higher employee retention rates, higher rates of promotion for program participants, and improved manager effectiveness for promoted participants.

### Turn Managers into Active Coaches

As organizations continue to become more complex and the battle for talent remains heated, the companies with a coaching culture are more likely to succeed in attracting and keeping employees.

The American Management Association (AMA) offers five strategies to turn managers into active coaches. It is similar to "train the trainer" because the skills will be used to coach employees and to transform many employees into coaches in support of the coaching culture. The first point the AMA makes is that the managers learning coaching techniques must be motivated to learn the skills because the skills will improve their personal success and the success of their employees.

Top-down senior support for the development of coaching skills is critical because it takes invested time and resources. Managers need to feel comfortable spending the time learning coaching skills and have access to the right development resources. Coaching should be discussed in management meetings, during performance evaluations, and in organizational materials like HR newsletters and recognition programs.

The AMA suggests developing basic core skills first. They are "listening, questioning, observing, building rapport, constructive analysis and feedback, empathy, supportive encouragement, and holding others accountable."

There are various ways to teach the skills, with workshops and on-demand development tools being two. However, managers must be willing to utilize the skills in real-world situations and should be able

to share the specific experiences with other managers. To accelerate the development process, the organization can assign another manager or executive who has mastered coaching skills to the learning manager as a role model. Finally, reward the coaches who are the best performers with promotion opportunities when they arise.



### Coaching Skills Promote Sharing

A coaching culture brings many benefits to an organization. It promotes feedback, innovation, high performance and engagement. Coaching can be integrated into the talent process so that all employees understand the coaching culture is considered a core value.

While it is usually managers who get formal development opportunities, all employees who embrace the coaching model of dialogue and feedback will be able to understand their roles in the process and take advantage of conversations that can advance personal career goals.

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