

# 1

## The Importance of Coaching



### *Learning Objectives*

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define coaching.
- Describe the key factors that make coaching a critical managerial tool in a competitive environment.
- Describe three attributes of an effective coach.
- Create a performance improvement plan to develop coaching skills.

My associate Jeff and I were training a group of newly promoted supervisors. Our topic was Effective Coaching and the discussion was lively. The group brainstormed a list of critical coaching skills and then, in pairs, each selected the three to five skills they believed most important. I circulated around the room and listened in on the conversations. I was struck by what two marketing supervisors were discussing and asked them to share their observations with the group. One of them began, “We talked about the fact that neither of us has had much coaching. So we’re glad that we’re learning how to coach. We would have benefited a lot from working with a good coach, and we want to make sure we do this for those we’re supervising.”

Several managers began to talk at once. An accounting supervisor captured much of what was being said. “Most of us can empathize with the fact that we’ve had little coaching. But the more I think about the ways in which it can make a difference, the clearer it is that coaching is vital.” I summarized the discussion by agreeing with the group—in today’s workplace, coaching is vital!

## WHAT IS COACHING?

Let's begin by defining the word *coaching*. Read the following definitions and circle the one that best matches your description.

- Coaching is an interactive process that helps another person improve, learn something, or take performance to the next level.
- Coaching means working as a trusted counselor, guide, tutor, or mentor.
- Coaching involves someone with more wisdom and experience sharing his/her knowledge and expertise.
- Coaching means an ability to diagnose an issue and propose a solution, as well as to motivate others to achieve their best.
- Coaching is a form of feedback that helps another person realize what is not working and take steps to get on the right track.

Although each definition describes aspects of coaching, the first definition is the most accurate and comprehensive. Thus, coaching is *an interactive process that helps another person improve, learn something, or take performance to the next level*. Let's break down this definition. First, "coaching is an interactive process" means it is a dialogue of give-and-take between the coach and the coachee. Coaching is not a monologue, and effective coaches listen as much as—sometimes more than—they talk. Second, coaching has multiple purposes. Sometimes the purpose is improvement, and the coach helps an individual overcome a problem. Sometimes coaching is about learning, and the coach enables the coachee to master a new skill, task, or behavior. Sometimes coaching is about growth, helping good performers maximize their potential. Coaching usually takes place in the context of a conversation—it is a conversation with a purpose. But coaching also occurs when you invite an employee to sit in on a meeting to see how you handle it, or when you assign a special project that stretches an individual's skills.

Leaders who coach help their organizations do a better job of achieving major business goals. A manager of a large retail store put it this way: "Coaching is the way you get the most out of employees. I owe it to the organization to maximize results. Coaching develops the next generation of leaders, retains top talent, and taps into the vast resources of human potential. When managers coach they release aspirations, build capabilities, and generate a strong sense of personal satisfaction. Coaching unlocks latent potential and reinforces strong skills where they already exist."

## WHY COACHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Organizations that do not perform at their peak find that over the long term, they are *unable* to compete. In fact, it has become increasingly important for leaders to help organizations meet the following challenges.

- Keeping customers happy
- Delivering high quality products and services
- Managing continuous change
- Retaining top talent
- Working in collaborative networked organizations
- Building personal capability to match performance demands
- Empowering breakthrough results
- Reinforcing business practices

Creating a coaching culture is essential to helping businesses meet these challenges successfully. Let's examine the role coaching plays in enabling organizational peak performance.

### **Keeping Customers Happy**

In today's vigorously competitive market, businesses must develop relationships that retain the loyalty of existing customers and enable new customer markets to be served effectively. Keeping customers loyal and happy requires finding out what it takes to make your product or service stand out. Good coaches play a variety of roles in ensuring customer retention and growth. At one major insurance company, for example, customer retention depends on the quality and speed of service. Customers expect to deal with knowledgeable people who can make decisions on the spot. A reengineering team was formed to find several ways to improve the quality and speed of service delivery. Angie, the team leader told me, "Like all teams, they had to make an immediate decision about how to gather customer feedback. Our team chose to use the focus group approach, that is, meeting with small groups of customers face-to-face. My coaching really began here as we started to gather the data. Some of the feedback was hard to hear and discouraged us. I felt it was important to use lots of encouragement and remind the team we had an opportunity to turn things around. All the coaching paid off and we achieved some amazing results. We simplified the customer billing process and accelerated claims processing by 30 percent. Teams are a great way to solve business problems but the team leader must be a good coach."

### **Producing High Quality Products and Services**

Leading organizations know how to deliver customized, high-quality products and services at competitive costs. Coaching keeps employees focused on quality excellence; it enables them to work in ways that are more productive, efficient, and effective. Good coaches make the link between individual quality and the organization's ability to produce quality products or services. They use coaching discussions to explain that sustainable market share comes primarily through leadership in the customers' perception of product or service quality.

One organization implemented a process called Faster Market Intelligence, which was designed to infuse competitor information into the company as quickly as possible. Several divisions put this process into place.

A business development manager described the importance of coaching, “Faster Market Intelligence was a real step forward but it is complex. I didn’t realize how much learning was required just to get it up and running. I found myself doing a lot of coaching every day and it paid off. Not only me—two of my senior specialists who were experts in FMI played a major coaching role. I doubt if we could have gotten FMI in place, to say nothing of getting its benefits, without excellent coaching support.”

## Managing Continuous Change

“I think what’s key from a human resources standpoint is the ability to coach managers who need to help others deal with the pressure of change. The ability to deal with the changes we face today—change demanded by customers, government, and competitive forces—is a dilemma for managers at all levels. But often the pressure of change seems more intense for employees. Coaching plays a vital role in equipping individuals to adapt, to learn quickly, and to master behaviors required to deal with continuous change.” This was Kristen’s observation about how coaching helped her organization manage change. What else do coaches do to help others deal with the pressure of change?

Coaches use their communication skills to overcome resistance to change. They listen deeply and uncover the reasons for resistance. Sometimes it’s fear, sometimes it’s anger, sometimes it’s disappointment. Once coaches understand the reasons for resistance, they can build the coachees’ confidence in their ability to meet the demands of change.

One nurse administrator at a large hospital told me, “Today, change is happening so fast it’s hard to keep up. At this hospital, we have seen an incredible amount of change. Last year we built a new facility and that stretched all of us. I invested a lot of time coaching my nursing team. I was amazed how much time I spent listening to their concerns and then finding ways, together, to meet new expectations.”

## Retaining Top Talent

Employee retention refers to an organization’s ability to retain its most talented employees. This has become a critical issue. Why? Workforce demographics indicate some startling statistics that confront every employer:

- Each month more than 13 percent of workers in the United States quit their jobs.
- Fifty-five percent of U.S. employees often think of quitting or plan to quit within a given year.
- The average time to fill jobs has increased from 41 days to 51 days.
- More than half of all U.S. employers report that turnover continues to rise each year.

Leading edge companies—those that do a good job of minimizing turnover and maximizing retention of key employees—use coaching to ensure employees experience a greater sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Coaching fosters a sense of bonding with an organization and, importantly, provides a forum for resolving issues that might otherwise cause employees to leave. Remember that the new generations in the workforce, Gen X and Gen Y, want a strong coaching relationship with their managers. In fact, one of the reasons they choose to stay with an organization is because they feel a partnership with their boss. Coaching creates this bond.

## **Working in Collaborative Networked Organizations**

“It is always a challenge getting everybody on the same page on cross-functional projects. My hope is that we can stop reinventing the wheel. We’ve got to demonstrate that we can really help our clients get their products to the marketplace fast; I’ve got to have the cooperation of my counterparts around the world.”

The demands of leading projects like these are becoming more commonplace. Most of the organizations I work with engage in large, cross-functional projects, many of which span the globe. You may wonder, “What can coaching do to face challenges like these?” First, coaches clarify the importance of networking effectively with all stakeholders. As one coach said, “I make sure project leaders know that as soon as issues arise, they must get in there and resolve them quickly. Project leaders often underestimate the value of frequent communication on large, cross-functional projects. I share my experiences with them to illustrate that the only way to keep people engaged, motivated, and committed is through good communication.”

Second, large collaborative projects require sharp skills. Jack, who is coaching a major inter-organizational systems integration project, said, “Large, inter-organizational projects require superior project management skills. Frankly, no matter how good you are at leading projects, working on big, global projects is a whole new ballgame. I coach project leaders on what it means to take their skills to the next level. For example, it is critical that the team carefully track progress and keep on top of everything that is happening in every part of the organization involved in the project.”

## **Building Personal Capability to Match Performance Demands**

The need for increased competitiveness impacts everyone in the organization. As demands for higher performance continue to rise, the gap between performance expectations and personal capabilities widens. Take a minute and think about how your work has changed over the past 12 to 18 months:

- What new skills have you had to master?
- What new responsibilities have been added to your job?
- What challenges are you facing that require you to develop new ways of doing things?

It takes coaching to fill these performance gaps. Coaches explain not only what new skills are required but also why they are important. They encourage coachees to stretch beyond perceived personal limits and provide the guidance and feedback indispensable for skill mastery.

I asked one coach, a manager in a small parts manufacturing company, what he did to help build personal capabilities. He shared his ideas with me. “I do a couple of things. In our business new technology is available all the time. Before you know it, you’re out-of-date. I use coaching discussions to understand what type of training people need to master new technologies. I also talk about what our competitors are doing and discuss best practices. This is especially important for my first-level supervisors. Sometimes there is a tendency to get complacent. Talking about best practices highlights areas where we need to build stronger capabilities for competitiveness.”

## **Reinforcing Business Practices**

Organizations today, in light of Sarbanes-Oxley, must exercise a heightened degree of oversight in the area of ethical compliance. In fact, most of the companies I work with have put programs in place to reinforce their commitment to business ethics. A first-level manager in an investment firm said, “We used to take it for granted that talking about our business practices during new employee orientation was enough. Not any more. I coach my investment specialists in ethics on a routine basis.”

When you think about it, reinforcing business practices is an important coaching role. Nothing is more essential than making sure coachees understand what is expected in terms of conducting business in ways that are ethical and in keeping with your organization’s practices. Ethical issues range from hiring fairly to dealing with political pressure, questionable accounting practices, conflicting policies, and others.

Employees sometimes wonder whether the ethics code is just words. With constant attention to ethical decision making, companies avoid legal crises and other problems. As a coach you make knowledgeable suggestions about how to handle ethical dilemmas and reinforce the need for compliance. Coaching makes it easy for employees to overcome their reluctance to talk about troubling workplace issues. As one coach shared with me, “Advice from someone who has been there is vital. There is increasing scrutiny from everyone about how we do business. Also, you have to face the risk of personal liability. That’s a lot of pressure. Some aspects of compliance are clear—others are less so. I get coaching from my boss when I sense a gray area. Her insights and advice are invaluable.”

## **Empowering Breakthrough Results**

Most organizations have lived through various rounds of cost cutting, reengineering, and similar measures designed to survive, trim expenses, and improve processes. What has become clear is that the leadership skills required for these organizational improvements are very different from leading for breakthroughs. *Breakthroughs* mean achieving heights the organization has never reached—in products or services offered in the marketplace. It means engaging the hearts, minds, and talents of everyone to create innovative customer solutions.

Effective coaches encourage new approaches and challenge old assumptions, as well as facilitate creative thinking. As head of a major Boston distri-

bution center said, “In coaching conversations, both one-on-one and with teams, I help people understand that they can accomplish things they think are impossible. There’s an assumption that only “special people” with “unique talents” achieve breakthroughs. But in reality, most of the important innovations we’ve seen over the last several years were done by people who had a vision of what’s possible and made it happen. Invariably, you find out that the person or team responsible for the breakthrough was the recipient of strong coaching.”

Certainly organizations seeking to create a powerful future understand that wherever high performance is required, coaching is essential. Take a moment and think about how coaching has personally benefited you.

### **Exercise 1–1: Your Best Coach**

*Instructions:* Your best coach may be someone in your business or personal life. It may be someone you encountered while in school, in sports, or some other activity. Answer the following questions and describe how this person’s coaching benefited you.

1. Who was this coach? What role did this person play in your life?

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2. What did this person enable you to do that you could not have done without his or her coaching?

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3. What did this person say or do to coach you? Think about what he or she said, or the behaviors he or she exhibited that made the person a good coach.

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Exercise 1–1 highlights how much value a good coach provides. Now let’s take it a step further and describe the attributes of a good coach.

## ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD COACH

Cell Corp. was facing a competitive crisis. The entrance of new competitors into the communications market threatened the organization's status as one of the top two or three companies in its industry. Many of the new entrants were small, agile companies that offered technologies Cell Corp. did not have. As customers' demand for voice, high-speed data, and video communications increased, Cell Corp. found itself losing business.

Jerry's team has been assigned responsibility for creating a high-speed dial-up technology. Customers were clamoring for this service; increasingly they heard competitors were able to provide faster Internet access that was more reliable and cost effective.

Jerry admitted, "I only thought about coaching when we had to get through a crisis—a major systems problem—that sort of thing. But the need to create this new technology is placing incredible demands on everyone. I've got to do a much better job coaching if we're going to meet this challenge. We've got to be focused, creative, and really pull together as a team. My project leaders will need lots of encouragement and help solving problems as they arise. I talked with a friend of mine who is a great coach. I asked him, "Tell me what a good coach does—I need to become one! Are there certain things great coaches do?" Jerry's question is a good one: What do good coaches do?

The Coaching Attributes Assessment describes six critical skills that good coaches exhibit. Take the assessment to gain insight into which behaviors you already practice and where you need to develop stronger skills.

### **Exercise 1–2: Coaching Attributes Assessment**

*Instructions:* The assessment is designed to help you understand more about the attributes of an effective coach and gain insights into which behaviors you now practice and where you need to develop stronger skills.

For each statement, circle the number that best reflects the attitude you typically exhibit.

When you have responded to all the statements, turn to the score sheet, transfer your ratings, and calculate your total score. Next, read the interpretation; it will provide insight into your effectiveness as a coach.

Finally, you will have an opportunity to create an action plan that identifies specific attributes you want to strengthen. If you have an opportunity, ask one or two people who work for you to take the assessment. Gaining their perspective will provide a more objective appraisal of your skills as a coach.

To what extent do you typically exhibit the following attitudes? You:

	Almost Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently	Almost Always
1. Understand what the coachee needs.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Take a goal-focused approach.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Help the coachee see mistakes as opportunities to learn to do things better.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Encourage the coachee to do his or her best.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Are willing to teach coachee something new.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Avoid distractions when coaching others.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Take the time to understand coachee's important concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Help set goals for improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Ask a coachee, "What do you think you need to do differently?" or similar questions.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Openly express a desire to see the coachee succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Provide specific ideas or suggestions during a coaching session.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Listen to what the coachee needs from you at the moment.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Make sure you listen to the coachee's issues and concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Work with the coachee to create a clear plan for achieving coaching goals.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Talk through how to overcome blind spots or obstacles.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Encourage the coachee to stretch his or her skills.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Share your experience with the coachee.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Maintain coachees' confidentiality.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Help the coachee assess strengths and weaknesses.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Carefully consider what you want to accomplish in a coaching session.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Help the coachee think through difficult issues.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Tell the coachee you believe he/she can take performance to the next level.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Carefully decide what suggestions to make during the coaching session.	1	2	3	4	5

24. Value coachees' ability to solve their own problems.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Explain your rationale when advising the coachee what he/she should do to solve a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Show coachees how their performance impacts the entire work unit, even to the bottom line.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Listen to the coachee in order to identify good ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Let the coachee know you have confidence in what he/she can do.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Advise the coachee how to overcome performance blocks.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Devote the time needed for coaching.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Talk with coachees about lessons learned to provide insight about what to do in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Discuss long-term professional goals.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Give coachees lots of time to express their views when discussing performance improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Make sure coachees know how you will support them.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Wait to give advice until the coachee is open to hearing what you have to say.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Respect who the coachee is as a person.	1	2	3	4	5

### Coaching Attributes Assessment—Score Sheet

Discerns Needs	Demonstrates Results Orientation	Works as a Thinking Partner
1 _____	2 _____	3 _____
7 _____	8 _____	9 _____
13 _____	14 _____	15 _____
19 _____	20 _____	21 _____
25 _____	26 _____	27 _____
31 _____	32 _____	33 _____
<b>Subtotal</b> _____	<b>Subtotal</b> _____	<b>Subtotal</b> _____

Encourages the Coachee	Provides Advice	Demonstrates Respect
4 ____	5 ____	6 ____
10 ____	11 ____	12 ____
16 ____	17 ____	18 ____
22 ____	23 ____	24 ____
28 ____	29 ____	30 ____
34 ____	35 ____	36 ____
<b>Subtotal</b> ____	<b>Subtotal</b> ____	<b>Subtotal</b> ____

**TOTAL SCORE (Add the six Subtotals):**

### Analysis of Coaching Attributes Assessment

The assessment is based on the following attributes of an effective coach:

**Discerns Needs.** Effective coaches discern what a coachee needs by:

- Seeking to understand what the coachee needs to do to turn performance around
- Uncovering what the coachee needs to do to move to the next level of performance
- Identifying the coachee's strengths and weaknesses
- Identifying gaps between actual performance and desired performance

**Demonstrates a Results Orientation.** Effective coaches demonstrate a results orientation by:

- Encouraging the coachee to see new possibilities
- Helping the coachee set goals for improvement or growth
- Creating and executing a coaching plan
- Showing the coachee how his or her performance impacts the entire team

**Works as a Thinking Partner.** Effective coaches act as a thinking partner by:

- Listening deeply and with empathy
- Helping coachees think through issues and identify what they need to do
- Drawing out ideas and knowledge
- Asking questions and reframing issues when the coachee has made incorrect assumptions

**Encourages New Behaviors.** Effective coaches encourage new behaviors by:

- Encouraging coachees to change
- Talking about how to close performance gaps
- Brainstorming ways to overcome performance obstacles
- Encouraging coachees to stretch their skills

**Provides Advice.** Effective coaches provide advice by:

- Advising coachees what to do in a way that is candid and caring
- Being sensitive to timing and providing advice when coachees are open to hearing it
- Listening carefully to the coachee before giving advice
- Being willing to teach the coachee something new

**Demonstrates Respect.** Effective coaches demonstrate respect by:

- Devoting full attention to the coachee during coaching discussions
- Listening carefully to what the coachee needs
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Seeking and valuing the coachee's input

### Score Analysis

- 180–144: Your score indicates strong coaching attributes. You demonstrate skills in discerning the needs of a coachee, maintaining a results orientation, and showing a willingness to act as a thinking partner. You also encourage new behaviors and, as needed, are willing to provide advice. Finally, you work with the coachee to stretch skills, you express confidence in the coachee, and you demonstrate respect for the coachee as an individual.
- 143–115: Your score indicates you have good coaching skills. Review your assessment and note any patterns with respect to the questions where you scored 3 or less.
- 114–92: Your score indicates a need to improve your coaching approach. There are several areas in which you need to focus on development. Think about the aspects of coaching that you find most difficult to deal with. This will give you insight into which areas to focus on.
- Below 92: Your approach to coaching needs considerable improvement. It is likely that you find coaching difficult, or perhaps you have not had much experience coaching. Your scores indicate an opportunity to improve in all the coaching attributes. Select one or two areas that are most important and build your performance improvement plan around them.

Good coaches do a lot of things well. But a few particular attributes or characteristics distinguish the best coaches. We will look at each in greater detail. These coaches:

- Discern what the coachee needs.
- Demonstrate a results orientation.
- Work as a thinking partner.
- Encourage the coachee.
- Provide sound advice.
- Demonstrate respect for the coachee.
- Possess the desire and willingness to be a coach.

## Discern What the Coachee Needs

This is one of the first things coaches do when beginning a coaching relationship. Think about Jerry and his team. The team needs to do several things to develop the high-speed Internet technology. Where does it start?

Jerry's boss described this attribute as follows. "Jerry's team is a good one. Getting this high-speed technology operational is a real test; they can do it, but Jerry's got to coach them through it. He must be strategic about where to focus his coaching efforts. Building on their core strengths and helping them overcome weaknesses that will inhibit their ability to design this technology are his first priority."

Coaches like Jerry use several questions to assess what coachees need; for example:

- What new capabilities does the team need to develop?
- What can block our ability to develop this technology?
- Is there training we need?

By discerning needs, the coach makes a factual analysis, assesses strengths and weaknesses, identifies performance gaps, and guides people to close these gaps.

## Demonstrate a Results Orientation

Good coaches tie their coaching conversations to goals for improvement, learning, or growth. They also make sure there is a plan in place that supports these goals. Jerry's friend gave him another insight into the importance of a goal-focused approach. He explained, "As you coach the team, make sure you explain to each person how his or her performance impacts the entire team. Results are about more than what each person does individually; people need to understand there is a cumulative effect on the bottom line. A good coach paints this picture—it makes each person's work more meaningful and motivates people to pursue goals."

I have experienced another aspect of results orientation firsthand. Whenever employees left a coaching discussion muttering, "Why does she want me to do that?" I knew I had not done a thorough coaching job. I made it a point to follow up and explain *why* the goals we set are important, or why I stressed certain behaviors. A results orientation includes explaining your coaching rationale that puts your conversations into the broader context.

## Work as a Thinking Partner

Good coaches listen as much as they talk. By listening deeply and with empathy, coaches help coachees think through issues and identify what they need to do.

Jerry found himself playing the role of a thinking partner several times during the project. His team worked aggressively to develop the high-speed Internet capability. Once a week, they met and discussed the status of the

project. Three months into the project, a special meeting was called to resolve problems with project priorities.

Jerry said, “I realized the priority issue provided several teachable moments. I had to ask myself, ‘Do I just tell the team what to do or do I help them think through the alternatives and make a sound decision?’” He decided to play the role of a thinking partner and help the group sort out conflicting priorities. Jerry listened to the discussion and then asked a few questions. “If we change our priorities, how will this impact the deliverables we have committed to in the project plan? How will this change affect other teams that are depending on our output?” The subsequent discussion was very fruitful; Jerry watched the team wrestle with the implications of changing priorities. Like all good thinking partners, Jerry facilitated the team’s ability to solve the priority problem. His team made a well thought-out decision and kept the priorities unchanged.

## Encourage the Coachee

Over the years I have asked various groups, “What are some things that coaches do that encourage you, and how do they communicate a positive approach to coaching?” Here are some of the most common responses:

- Caring about me and how I am doing.
- Making me feel confident.
- Wanting me to be successful.
- Reassuring me that I can do it.
- Not letting me give up.

The ability to encourage coachees is sometimes an undervalued attribute. Skilled coaches encourage coachees when they are discouraged, fearful, or feel inadequate to the task. Encouragement is also important when a coachee comes face to face with his/her limitations. Alexis, a software engineer, described her experience as follows. “I loved the opportunity to work on new products at DISC.COM. But if you’ve ever done it, you know it can be frustrating. Deadlines come around sooner than you think, conflicts emerge on the team, and customers change specs a million times. My project leader was an incredible coach. She would listen to me when I was at some real low points and coach me through them; she wouldn’t let me give up! I can still hear her telling me, ‘You can do this, Alexis. I have confidence that you’ll be able to work through the obstacles that are part of any new product development process.’ Then, she would remind me of all the things I had accomplished so far. By the time we finished talking, I felt ready to try again.”

Other things coaches do to encourage coachees include:

- Acknowledging transferable skills with enthusiasm.
- Giving examples of what a good job would look like.
- Providing concrete examples of how others have mastered new behaviors.
- Giving praise when progress is made.
- Helping the individual analyze successes and failures.

## Provide Sound Advice

As a coach, you can choose to be more or less directive. When you use the skill of providing advice, you are choosing to give the coachee specific direction. What types of situations call for giving advice? Look at the following list:

- The coachee needs specific guidance about how to overcome a problem.
- You have knowledge that the coachee needs.
- The coachee comes to you for an opinion about what to do.
- There are blind spots that the coachee cannot see.

Good coaches don't just launch into giving advice. Instead, they do three things to maximize the opportunity for learning and growth:

1. They make sure coachees understand the issue and where they need guidance, input, or suggestions.
2. They ask coachees what they have done to date. Once you understand what they have tried, you are in a better position to provide well-targeted advice.
3. They check with the coachees to make sure they know how to act on the advice.

A bank manager talked about how he offers advice to a coachee: "I believe it is important to offer advice in a way that is both candid and caring. There will be times when you need to initiate the advice giving; it is important to be sensitive to timing and provide advice when the coachee is open to hearing it. I learned this the hard way. I used to give lots of advice whenever I thought an employee needed it. But coaches need to demonstrate an understanding of the coachees' openness to listening, especially when the advice is difficult to hear."

## Demonstrate Respect for the Coachee

Good coaches are respectful. You show respect when you avoid making assumptions and listen carefully to what the coachee needs from you. Here is how Rebecca described her coach. "Andrea is an expert in sports medicine and she has been coaching me for six months. I just got my bachelor's degree and I really am a beginner in this field. Andrea treats me like a peer; she listens to my questions and shares her expertise in a way that is never condescending. What I notice is that she does not push her ideas on me but respects my ideas and encourages me to try new things."

Coaches also demonstrate respect by giving coachees their full attention during a coaching session. My friend Chris describes the importance of this. "Have you ever talked with someone who was constantly checking his watch, answering the phone, and otherwise communicating that you're interrupting his day? My boss was well intentioned, but coaching discussions always went this way."

In addition, respectful coaches never divulge a confidence and honor the coachee's desire to keep certain information confidential. Sometimes an individual shares things with a coach that are highly personal. It is important to treat this information with care and to respect the coachee's need to keep it private.

There is one other way coaches demonstrate respect—they respect the coachee as an individual. For example, they acknowledge the coachee's stress level, and don't coach when emotions are high. They also learn which coaching techniques are most appreciated by a coachee. For example, some tend to resent too much advice, whereas others value it highly.

## Desire and Willingness to be a Coach

Think about all the benefits we've discussed—the ways others benefit from your coaching. Your coaching sparks insights that lead to learning, growth, and success. The desire to coach begins with seeing yourself as someone who wants to have an impact on others. Nothing is more important than a desire to be a coach. In fact, without that desire, all the other attributes aren't of much use. Remember that the most important coaching asset is a desire to coach people and make a difference in their lives.

A lead technician for an environmental services firm observed, "If you have the desire to coach, it can make up for your lack of experience and even, to some extent, your lack of skill. I have found that skills come with practice, and of course you get experience by coaching. But it all starts with desire. Without that, all the techniques and tools won't help you."

### Exercise 1–3: Your Performance Improvement Plan

*Instructions:* The Coaching Attributes Assessment (Exercise 1–2) revealed what you consider your strengths and growth areas as a coach. In this exercise, identify the skill areas you want to focus on over the next six to nine months.

**Step One:** Write a statement that describes the things you and your team need to accomplish over the next six to nine months. Consider the business challenges that are most important.

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**Step Two:** Identify two to three things the team needs to do to meet this challenge.

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**Step Three:** List one to two coaching attributes you want to improve. These should be attributes that will help key individuals or the group meet the challenges identified in Step Two.

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## GETTING READY TO COACH

Let's end this chapter by examining some practical ways you can get ready to coach. You want to begin the journey of becoming a masterful coach and develop new skills that enable you to achieve this goal. Sometimes the issue is one of confidence. I have talked with people who want to be masterful coaches but question their skills, style, technique, etc. But in many instances people have more coaching assets than they give themselves credit for.

You have already examined the attributes of an effective coach. Now look at the following checklist. This is a list of personal traits that illustrate how qualified you are to begin your coaching role. You will gain confidence as you answer the questions and become aware of all you have to offer as a coach.

### Exercise 1–4: What You Have to Offer

*Instructions:* Check the statements that best describe you.

- I have a desire to be a good coach.
- I have knowledge that I can share with others.
- I have had success teaching others.
- I have an ability to help others achieve results.
- I have been able to help others think through a problem.
- I am a good listener.
- I have the ability to give others good advice.
- I can encourage others to do their best.
- I like to see others succeed.
- I can help others see the big picture and see an issue from different perspectives.

How many statements did you check? If you checked at least half of these items, you already possess several assets that are important for masterful coaches. Congratulations—you are on your way!



Coaching is an interactive process that helps another person improve, learn something, or take performance to the next level.

Creating a culture of coaching is essential to helping businesses meet challenges related to keeping customers happy, producing high quality products and services, and managing continuous change. Coaching also helps organizations retain top talent, work in collaborative ways in a networked environment, build personal capabilities to match performance needs, empower breakthrough results, and reinforce business practices.

Good coaches exhibit several attributes. These include discerning what the coachee needs, demonstrating a results orientation, working as a thinking partner, encouraging new behavior, providing sound advice, demonstrating respect for the coachee, and possessing the desire and willingness to be a coach.

A three-part performance improvement plan is the first step in developing coaching skills. Step One is to write a statement describing the goals you and your team need to accomplish in the next six to nine months and the business challenges they represent. Step Two is to identify two to three things the team needs to do to meet these goals. Step Three is to choose one or two coaching attributes that you feel need improvement from those identified in the Coaching Attributes Assessment. Link these attributes to areas that will help key individuals or the group as a whole meet the challenges identified in Step Two.



## Review Questions

1. Coaching has multiple purposes, including: 1. (a)
  - (a) helping someone learn.
  - (b) taking over a project.
  - (c) handling a problem.
  - (d) seeking more resources.
  
2. When coaches provide advice, it is important that they: 2. (c)
  - (a) give praise when progress is made.
  - (b) help the coachee analyze success and failure.
  - (c) make sure they understand what the coachee has tried thus far.
  - (d) avoid hurting the relationship by being too directive.
  
3. Leading organizations use coaching to ensure that customized, high-quality products and services are offered at competitive costs. Coaches help businesses do this by keeping employees: 3. (a)
  - (a) focused on quality excellence.
  - (b) aware of reengineering opportunities.
  - (c) in touch with competitors.
  - (d) aware of product strengths.

4. Good coaches begin a coaching relationship by discerning what the coachee needs. They achieve this by: 4. (b)
- (a) empowering the coachee to take charge of the relationship.
  - (b) using questions to assess coachee strengths and weaknesses.
  - (c) telling the coachee how to address performance gaps.
  - (d) looking for ways to encourage the coachee to do better.
5. The first step in a performance improvement plan to develop coaching skills is to: 5. (d)
- (a) choose a coaching partner.
  - (b) identify difficult employees.
  - (c) develop a demographic profile of your organization's workforce.
  - (d) describe your goals and the business challenges they represent.

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