

Coaching for Improved Performance

Coaching is a method of strengthening communication between you and the employee, and can be used during check-in sessions. Coaching helps to shape performance and increase the likelihood that the employee's results will meet your expectations. Coaching sessions provide you and the employee the opportunity to discuss progress toward meeting mutually established standards and objectives.

A coaching session focuses on one or two aspects of performance, rather than the total review that takes place in a performance appraisal.

Key Elements of Coaching

To make your coaching session effective, you must understand the key elements of coaching:

- Coach when you want to focus attention on any specific aspect of the employee's performance.
- Observe the employee's work and solicit feedback from others.
- When performance is successful, take the time to understand what is working and the reasons behind it.
- Advise the employee ahead of time on issues to be discussed.
- Discuss alternative solutions.
- Agree on action to be taken.
- Schedule follow-up meeting(s) to measure results.
- Recognize successes and improvements.
- Document key elements of coaching session.

Questions to Consider When Coaching

To provide effective feedback you must understand the elements of performance and analyze marginal performance. Keep these questions in mind:

- How is the employee expected to perform?
- Does the employee understand these expectations? If not, why not?
- Does the employee know what successful results look like? How do you know?
- Does the employee know the performance is marginal? How do you know?
- Are there obstacles beyond the employee's control? Can you remove them?
- Has the employee ever performed this task satisfactorily?
- Is the employee willing and able to learn?
- Does satisfactory performance result in excessive work being assigned?
- Does unsatisfactory performance result in positive consequences such as an undesirable task being reassigned?

Coaching Behaviors

To make the most of coaching the employee, remember to follow these coaching guidelines:

- Focus on behavior, not personality.
- Ask the employee for help in problem identification and resolution. Use active listening to show you understand.
- Set specific goals and maintain communication.

- Use reinforcement techniques to shape behavior.

During the Coaching Session

When conducting a coaching session to provide positive feedback, keep the following ideas in mind:

- Describe the positive performance result or work habit using specific details.
- Solicit your employee's opinion of the same product or behavior.
- Ask the employee to identify elements that contributed to success (adequate time or resources, support from management or other employees, the employee's talent and interest in the project).
- Discuss ways in which you and the employee can support continued positive results.
- Reinforce for the employee the value of the work and how it fits in with the goals of the work unit or department.
- Show your appreciation of the positive results and your confidence that the employee will continue to perform satisfactorily.
- If appropriate, document your discussion for the employee's file.

When you conduct a coaching session to improve performance, you may want to use the following format:

- Describe the issue or problem, referring to specific behaviors or expectations.
- Involve the employee in the problem-solving process to identify the problem.
- Brainstorm and write down possible solutions.
- Decide on specific actions to be taken by each of you to correct the problem.
- Agree on a follow-up date.
- Document key elements of the session. Give one copy to the employee and place another in the employee's file.

If your coaching session is conducted to address poor work habits such as continued tardiness, keep these steps in mind:

- Describe in detail the poor work habit observed.
- Say why it concerns you, in terms of its specific impact on the department.
- Ask why it occurred and listen non-judgmentally to the explanation. Describe the need for change and ask for ideas.
- Discuss each idea and offer your help.
- Agree on specific actions to be taken and set a specific follow-up date.
- Document key elements of the session. Give one copy to the employee and place another in the employee's file.

Follow-Up Discussion

To conduct a follow-up discussion, consider the following steps:

- Review the previous discussion(s).
- Discuss the business reason why the situation/problem continues to be a cause for concern and ask for reasons why the situation continues.
- Indicate consequence of continued lack of improvement. (No threats! This isn't an oral warning.)

- Agree on action to be taken and set a follow-up date, if appropriate.
- Convey your confidence in the employee.
- Document key elements of the session. Give one copy to the employee and place another in the employee's file.