

Welcome to my March newsletter. I was recently asked by AIM (the Australian Institute of Management) to lead a discussion group on mentoring / coaching in the workplace. Below are extracts from notes prepared for that session.

Introduction

As organisations seek to create a culture that is more collaborative and less 'command and control', leaders and managers are recognising the importance of honing their coaching skills.

Coaching is about helping people (your staff, peers, teams) to improve their performance. It involves structured conversations, between the manager/leader and an individual, which are directed to bringing about positive change. The role of the manager/coach is to guide: to work with the individual through processes of goal setting, issues identification, action planning and progress monitoring.

"Coaches are experts in facilitating learning and goal attainment. Coaches help [people] find their own solutions. Coaches ask the right questions." (Jane Greene and Anthony Grant "Solution-Focused Coaching" 2003 Pearson Education Limited)

One of the vital components in a successful coaching process is the person *being* coached – they set goals; they take action, they reflect on the results of their actions; they are in a state of continuous learning. Their development depends on them, as well as on the coach and the coaching process.

Who can you coach? It doesn't just have to be the people reporting directly to you. You can coach your boss, peers, team members, people in other areas.

Benefits of coaching include....

Your staff

- * They feel valued, inspired, motivated, and invested in
- * Their skills and competence are improved
- * They gain increased self awareness
- * They take greater responsibility for themselves
- * They work towards closing the gap between actual and expected performance

You

- * Helps you to be a better leader / manager
- * Saves time (your own)
- * Provides job satisfaction

The Organisation

- * Improves staff retention and staff satisfaction
- * Leads to better communication
- * Promotes overall better performance in people and the organisation
- * Can help when introducing change
- * Increases morale
- * Improves collaboration
- * Supplements training, peer pressure, reorganisations and change
- * Builds effective teams
- * Less conflict

Difficulties that might be encountered

Some barriers that might impede managers/leaders introducing coaching to their toolkit:

- * Non-supportive workplace; not easy in a command and control environment
- * Not everyone can be a good coach or has time to learn
- * No time to coach
- * Not interested, or lack confidence
- * Fad – it will go away soon
- * Can feel like losing control, used to telling and directing, used to being the expert
- * Staff might not want to fully reveal themselves in coaching conversations with internal managers

What You Can Do: Tips for developing your coaching skills

“Listening well is essential for workplace success. Listening is an art.” (Daniel Goleman, “Working With Emotional Intelligence” Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998)

Here are just a few ideas to get you (or your staff) started:

- Improve your listening skills, concentrate, take notes, be present, don't drift off
- Be comfortable using silence
- Before the meeting, prepare your mental state, clear your internal and external space of static and distractions
- Guide, don't tell, do not have the solution in your mind, know when to make suggestions
- Enjoy the process; be happy to be doing this
- Use open questions, be curious
- Be honest, reliable, authentic, self-aware
- Look for mindsets and beliefs that affect performance
- Be detached from the outcome, be the observer
- Focus on the solutions and on looking forward
- Suspend value judgements
- Be patient and tolerant and respectful
- Show empathy
- Help set goals that are stretching and attainable, and measurable
- Establish trust, maintain confidentiality
- Follow-up
- Learn about coaching tools and techniques

About This Article

My aim is to provide you with information to assist you at work, with your own development, and in developing your staff. The theme for 2004 is 'Building Collaborative Workplaces'. Each month I concentrate on an area based on topics raised by my clients. Material is drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

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