

Employee Motivation: Coach Your Team To Success



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Coach Your Team To Success



After breaking just about every record known to golf—and setting many that were inconceivable—Tiger Woods still needs coaches—and so does everyone else who aspires to any level of achievement. That includes you, and it most certainly includes your team. Just to be clear, I’m not talking about training, which is instructing people how to perform tasks for the first time. I’m talking about coaching them to improve their performance of those tasks over time, as well as helping them fulfill their responsibilities and achieve results—all while playing together nicely. **Coaching is an integral part of day-to-day leadership**, and also deals with attitudes, discipline, morale, ethics and sometimes career development. As a business owner you may think you’re too busy with your own work to spend extra time communicating or boosting employee morale, but consider this: Your leadership can help create motivated, more productive employees. These high-performance employees will, in turn, lighten your workload.

Considering that employee performance ratings often occur somewhere between outstanding and poor, this “in between” range is where coaching can have its greatest impact. Retaining top talent is essential to your

agency’s success. Rather than waiting for things to go wrong, or accepting sub-par performance, why not offer employees ongoing performance feedback? **If you want better employees, you just might have to mold them yourself!**

Why your team needs you as their coach

1. Teams need coaching because training alone is never enough to create optimal performance. If that was true, then everyone who understands how to play tennis could compete at Wimbledon. According to *Managing Major Sales* by Neil Rackham and Richard Ruff, 87 percent of the skills gained during typical sales training is lost within one month. That’s an appalling 13 percent effectiveness of the training. Effective coaching consists of constructive, consistent feedback aimed at increasing awareness and resulting in improved performance. If you’re delivering vast amounts of information in training sessions and getting poor results, consider breaking up the training into smaller segments—then reinforce those consistently with ongoing coaching.

2. Teams need coaching because they need to get their engagement level higher. In a study of

Wells Fargo practices by the Gallup Organization, the best branch managers in the country rated team member engagement as the most important reason for their respective branches' overall success—even above sales performance. Gallup then measured how the managers were allocating their time. Only 19 percent of their time was spent on employee engagement, and only 12 percent was focused on improving the customer experience—something else that rated high in things that contributed to their success. Yet in this case at least, they weren't spending a proportionate amount of time on the things they said mattered the most. It's not surprising that profits were higher at branches where managers placed more emphasis on employee engagement.

Regular coaching demonstrates to your team that you are engaged with *them* and care about how they are doing—on multiple levels—since coaching often encompasses interpersonal and just plain personal issues as well. It's another reflection of the Hawthorne Effect I discussed on Page 103. Productivity increases simply from additional attention paid to your team.



3. Teams need coaching as a way to manage all the changes required in their daily work lives. As you well know, there are new products, as well as changes and enhancements to existing ones all the time—rarely a month goes by that something doesn't change that affects your team. This constant state of flux can be very draining and stressful as they continually fight to remember the latest permutations of the product line. As a coach it's important to show that you understand the problem, and when appropriate, that you empathize with your team member about the overwhelm it causes. Often just knowing that their boss

is aware of how difficult a situation is, will be enough to de-stress an employee. One tactic is to be understanding when someone does make a mistake because of information overload.

4. Teams need coaching because it helps them focus on what's important. Such a huge amount of time is wasted on things that don't contribute to the bottom line, that this one area alone can be a coaching goldmine. Coach your team to prioritize their activities and give them filters to use when they are faced with too many things to do and not enough time to do them all. **Filters can be a series of questions printed on a small card attached to their computer monitor, for example:**

- Is this the best use of my time?
- How does this activity make a client more satisfied?
- How does this task contribute to the bottom line?
- Is there an easier way to accomplish this?
- Should I ask for help?

5. Teams need coaching because it melts the stress away. As more and more brain research reveals, the consequences of stress on the brain are alarming. Scientists agree that stress causes actual



chemical changes in the brain, and these changes can influence our health. A chronic overreaction to stress overloads the brain with powerful hormones that are intended only for short-term duty in emergency situations. Their cumulative effect damages and kills brain cells and affects the brain's ability to remember and learn. We already looked at many reasons for employee stress on Page 95 (Are your campers unhappy?). Add to that list confusion about how to perform certain tasks, as well as lack of clarity about what is expected from them in general. That's where good coaching can turn the tide and allow your team members to relax. Making good on your promise to be available and providing good coaching will prove to employees that you want them to succeed and that you're doing your part to make it happen.



Coaching can help you re-recruit your team

Surprised? After recruiting good employees, many business owners fail to retain them, because once the initial flurry of excitement of their attraction and hiring passes, agents begin to take their team members for granted—and the employees know it. To re-recruit someone is to renew or restore the health, vitality and intensity of the employer-employee relationship. This concept is especially important to practice in a competitive employment environment. If other agencies might be interested in recruiting your best people, it's a smart strategy to beat them to the punch!

How do you do it? Coaching, of course. In a

more formalized—yet very friendly, upbeat—coaching session, ask a series of questions designed to give you both a big picture snapshot of the state of that employee's experience with your agency. You could ask:

- What's your overall level of satisfaction with your job?
- What have you learned from working here?
- What things have you accomplished?
- Do you feel you have enough opportunities for growth here?
- What expectations do you have that are not yet met?
- Are there new skills you'd like to learn?
- Do you feel ready for new and/or different responsibilities?

You may find that your employee is quite satisfied. Or you may discover opportunities to shift this member of your team to a different, more productive course of action. Either way, your employee benefits from your interest and attention. Make this a regular process, and you'll remain several steps ahead of other agents and their enticing carrots.

Notes

WORKSHEET

Who On Your Team Needs Re-Recruiting?

List all of your team members here and recall what you can about their desires and goals at the time you hired them. How do you think they are doing in that regard? What can you do to re-recruit them? What questions would you like to ask them?

NAME

NAME

NAME

NAME

NAME

NAME

NAME

NAME

Two ways to effectively coach your team

Perhaps when you think about coaching you imagine a **structured session with a pre-planned agenda**. That is, indeed, one important way to coach your team members, and we'll explore that option in detail later in this strategy.

Another way to coach your team is to do it spontaneously as events unfold. Doing this well actually takes as much expertise and practice as the other method—perhaps more, because there is no time to prepare your thoughts. Don't let that stop you from implementing this style, though, as it has the ability to produce results more quickly.

I decided to teach you this method first, so you can see that it doesn't have to be a time-consuming, laborious process to coach someone.

There are just three steps to this on-the-fly coaching:



1. Chance
2. Change
3. Cheer

1. Look for CHANCES to coach.

It's a mistake to view coaching as necessary only when employee performance is weak, when you notice someone making a mistake or when employees get so discouraged they're ready to quit. The best opportunities are when you notice someone doing something *right*. When you reinforce good behavior on the spot, it gives the employee a major boost in self-esteem and confidence and programs them to repeat the activity. The brain learns best by positive reinforcement, so look for ways to amplify patterns you want to sustain.

For other chances to coach in the moment, you may need to start a conversation. Check in regularly with your team members, but you must truly desire to hear their response. If you ask "How are things going?" you must be willing to hear the real answer and be ready to coach. A steady regime of this will build trust between you and your team and lead to more openness and more productive interactions. Coaching can happen every day—but only in a climate of trust and respect.

2. Identify what is possible to CHANGE.

Whether it *is* something you want to correct or something that can be made even better, pick just one aspect to coach in these brief interludes. This isn't the time to launch into a lecture about the merits of long-term health care. Pick one thing you think your employee can work on changing and discuss just that. Keep it upbeat and simple, especially if it's behavior you are trying to correct. Instead of saying: "What you just did there was the wrong way to handle that situation," try saying: "Have you ever thought about handling that situation differently? Perhaps next time you might try some active listening techniques with customers who are being difficult." Then you would give a simple example.

If it's positive behavior you want to amplify, then find something they can change to expand on their success. You might say:

"You handled that customer perfectly, and it's great that you were able to close a sale on the first interaction by clearly identifying the added value features of our auto insurance. Here's a pointer for the next time you're in that situation: Once you can sense you have the sale, and if you feel the customer may be receptive (meaning he or she isn't in a big hurry) then move into a deeper discussion of the merits of higher levels of coverage. The way that you get there, is by first asking what kinds of driving situations dominate this person's life. If this is someone who carools and often has multiple passengers, then that's a great reason to carry more coverage. Keep in mind, it's not about trying to upgrade the coverage every time—it's about making sure our customers have the appropriate coverage for their needs."

3. When you see your employee understands your coaching and seems ready to apply it, that's the time for a CHEER.

By cheer I mean offer words of encouragement, applause and even involve the whole team in giving positive feedback. Don't stop there—as you notice that same team member making an effort to apply the advice, cheer some more. When you witness results from your coaching, cheer even more. We all crave acknowledgement—especially when we're adopting new behaviors.

That's the process in a nutshell: Find a chance to coach, identify something that's possible to change and cheer your employee on.

This style of coaching also has an advantage for you—it takes the stress out of coaching—especially if you feel this is a weakness. Spontaneous coaching trains you to manage your time more effectively by seizing opportunities to shape team performance, encourage employees and reward them during any workday.

APPLYING THE 3 Cs

List opportunities in the past week or so when you could have practiced the Chance/Change/Cheer method of coaching. Doing this will cement the process in your mind and prepare you for similar opportunities which are bound to arise.

