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## Chapter **1**

# Understanding Coaching and Mentoring: Just the Basics

**Y**ou're a manager, possibly a first-level supervisor, middle manager, or executive. Whether you came upon the role recently or have many years of experience, you know that the job of being a manager isn't getting any easier. You carry a great deal of responsibility, and with the pace of change these days, more may be coming your way before you know it.

At the same time, you're expected to lead your group(s) and make them productive. And while you're at it, you have to keep your employees motivated and committed — you can't afford turnover problems.

Trying to do it all yourself isn't working as well as you would like it. Maybe your manager has strongly suggested that you change your approach. "Stop telling people what to do. Start coaching them." You've heard that coaching is a better way to lead people, but you're not sure what that means or where to start.

This chapter lays the conceptual foundation for the book. It introduces what coaching in the business world is all about and delves into its benefits, particularly how coaching can help you improve the performance of your team, keep them engaged and motivated, and give you some time in your schedule for important things that seem to fall by the wayside — like lunch!

## Getting the Lowdown on Business Coaching

The business of coaching has grown dramatically in the past 20 years. These days it seems everyone wants to be a coach. But what kind of coach? There are life coaches, relationship coaches, career coaches, and spiritual coaches. All coaching, however, shares a basic orientation to guide people and support people to find their own path.

Coaching, as defined in this book, has two aspects to it:

- » It's an approach to how someone functions in the role of being a manager. In the approach of managing as a coach, the manager operates as the leader, developer, and guide of the team and its individuals.
- » It's a set of management skills aimed at getting the most productivity out of employee performance. These skills or tools require hard work and often, a change in old habits, but they work.

Together, these two aspects of coaching give managers the best tools to deliver results and positively influence employee commitment.

Being a coach means that you see and approach the role of manager as a leader: one who challenges and develops your employees' skills and abilities to achieve the best performance results. In other words, if you manage as a coach, your staff members learn, grow, and work hard, too. Coaching is the pathway for multiplying your effectiveness through others, for getting the best out of people's performance. Managers who have discovered how to do this not only have stronger, more functional teams, but they also sleep better and have more time for more important things in their lives.

The work of developing as an effective coach and mentor starts by understanding how most managers approach managing people and what kind of changes need to happen to make the transition (see Chapter 2 for more on the skills needed for coaching and mentoring).

## MY PATH TO EXECUTIVE COACHING

I (Leo) started my career in marketing and advertising. When I was laid off, I fell into consulting, mostly writing, PR, and client surveys. Clients started to see that I had the ability to relate to their employees and make them feel comfortable discussing their problems. This led to beginning to coach people, though I wasn't sure what that meant. I learned from experience, reading, and taking courses to build my skills. Everything I know, however, is from directly helping people with problems: delegating, having hard conversations, managing their crushing workload, motivating teams, listening, learning to communicate clearly and persuasively, and focusing on the best use of their time.

I developed courses with templates and checklists to give people these tools to use. Along the way, I've seen and learned from managers who didn't lead people effectively and others who had figured it out. I made mistakes and learned what sticks and what doesn't and what changes behavior and what you need to be successful as a coach. I've taken my years of hard-earned experience of coaching specific skills and put them into this book. What you have is the effective tools and strategies I've used in my successful business that you, as a manager, can use in managing teams.

The following sections gives you an orientation to all the ways coaching can help you engage and motivate employees.

### Sneaking a quick look at the tools of coaching

Understanding and putting coaching tools into practice is a critical step in becoming a coach. Here's a quick look at various coaching tools, all of which I cover throughout this book:

- » Setting goals and performance plans (see Chapter 15)
- » Giving constructive performance feedback (see Chapter 14)
- » Conducting periodic performance reviews (see Chapter 16)
- » Guiding development through mentoring and tutoring (see Chapter 18)
- » Coaching with questions (see Chapter 11)
- » Taking employees under your wing
- » Motivating employee performance
- » Delegating to empower and increase productivity (see Chapter 13)

- » Training for skill development
- » Stimulating and supporting career development (see Chapter 17)
- » Intervening to build improvement in performance

The focus of these 11 coaching skills is on performance, which is the emphasis of coaching — getting the best out of people’s performance and helping people grow in their careers.

Coaching applies to any personality type, and although it does involve building working relationships, the nature of those relationships varies by individual. Some employees need pushing and firmness; others need little direction and a light touch. Sometimes you need to give direction and other times support. That is, the use of the coaching skills or tools is tailored to fit individual skill levels and needs.

You carry out these coaching skills through conversation and collaboration. These skills involve working with an employee in order for that person to go back to their job and perform successfully. Dedicating focused time to coach people is the key (refer to Chapter 3).

## Getting on board with coaching

Do any one of the following challenges and pressures affect you in your job as a manager?

- » Do more with fewer resources.
- » Get employees to adapt to change.
- » Find ways to increase efficiency and productivity.
- » Create an environment to retain employees.
- » Meet greater customer expectations.
- » Deliver results.

Thought so. In today’s increasingly fast-paced, ever-changing, and highly competitive environments, demands such as these are affecting many organizations — especially their managers. Demands and pressures cut across all types of businesses — private and public sectors, for-profit and nonprofit enterprises — and across all levels of management, from the top executive to a newly promoted first-level manager.

Yet what hasn't always kept pace with all these changes and expectations is the way that managers manage. Far too many managers still operate in a task-focused or a must-maintain-control fashion. If I just do more hands-on myself and tell everybody to do more, and everyone will get along just fine, right? Or I can toss in a few buzzwords or phrases to help: "All right everyone, you've been empowered. Now work smarter, not harder." The problem is, managing this way just doesn't work.



TIP

Because today's challenges aren't going away, managing as a coach is a necessity not only for your success, but also for your survival. Coaching is about helping others become more effective, developing employees to perform to their best ability and to function as self-sufficiently as possible, and challenging employees to take on responsibility instead of waiting to be told what to do. It also means supporting and involving your employees in the process.



REMEMBER

Coaching influences employee adaptability, productivity, and retention. It helps you make better use of your time. But many new and different efforts are needed. The road to success starts by making the shift from managing as a doer to managing as a coach. Read Chapter 2 to understand the differences.

## Differentiating between Coaching and Mentoring

In the business world, the terms *coaching* and *mentoring* are often used synonymously. Here's how this book distinguishes the two:

- » **Coaching:** Coaching is a set of skills to interact and empower employees to be more self-sufficient problem solvers. Unlike other forms of coaching, the focus here is on job performance — what's needed and expected in this position. A coaching approach can be used in mentoring employees by asking questions and engaging them, but the primary focus here is helping them do their job.
- » **Mentoring:** Mentoring is more focused on supporting the employee in their own development as a professional. It's often driven by the employee's needs rather than the demands of the job. It can include learning from a more senior person to fill in gaps in knowledge. But mentoring often goes beyond teaching someone by taking them under your wing. Mentors often advise and support people on their career and life. The focus isn't just on performance but on the needs of the employee.

Coaching and mentoring often work together, and the lines aren't always clear. Here are some examples to help you see how the roles play out:



EXAMPLE

Judith was a new hire at a marketing agency. Her role was to support the client managers with administration of social media campaigns. Judith's experience was limited to doing some case studies in college. She didn't understand what to do. Her manager, Samantha, sat down with her to explain what was expected and how to be successful at the agency. She asked Judith questions to understand her experience and career goals.

Samantha could see that Judith was feeling overwhelmed. She suggested that for the first week that Judith just observe more experienced people doing the tasks. She bonded with Jack, who was also fairly new. Jack and Judith went out to lunch, and Jack played an important role in helping her feel comfortable.

Samantha played more of a coaching role in guiding and engaging Judith. Her meetings were intentional; they were goal oriented toward getting her up to speed. She used a lot of questions to learn about Judith and took time to spell out the expectations. Samantha also suggested a course of action that would help Judith learn gradually.

Jack, on the other hand, played more of a mentor for Judith. He taught her his approach by letting her observe. He waited for her to ask questions. It was relaxed and friendly and gave Judith someone she could start to confide in. The relationship was more balanced. Jack was there for her, but he didn't have an agenda other than to help her with whatever she needed.

As this example illustrates, coaching and mentoring are both valuable tools. And like any tool, it all depends on the specific need. A wrench and pliers are similar, but one is better in certain applications. Flip to Chapter 2 to look more closely at the role and approach that coaches take. For more information on mentoring, check out Chapters 18 and 19. Coaching and mentoring share the same end goal: to help and support the employee's growth.