Coaching Skills: Getting Results through Others

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Some leaders wear multiple hats. They’re not only the leader, but are also a manager, teacher and coach. In an earlier session we looked at three basic, traditional styles of leadership which were entitled authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire. Leaders with a coaching style utilize the most fitting aspects of each traditional style according to individual team member needs, and the abilities of the team as a whole. This includes setting expectations, creating an environment for motivation, shifting between “hands on” and “hands off” management, giving performance feedback and helping individuals plan for improvement (Cormack, 1989).

Leaders using the coaching style are a good fit when an organization is structured around teams, needs someone who can keep a variety of workers motivated, needs a flexible type of leader or is in a competitive environment.
SETTING EXPECTATIONS

An expectation is a powerful force. With expectations set “just right,” individuals and teams can take aim and reach loftier goals, while gaining valuable experience and developing new skills. The thrill of accomplishment is both a great motivator and reward for human beings. When expectations are too high, individuals and groups may falter or experience burnout when working to meet those expectations. Set too low, people can rust out. In our society, there is no greater shame than wasted potential. Without an expectation, there is no goal, meaningful activity, relevant performance feedback or sense of accomplishment.

What is an Expectation? Some other words we use when defining expectation would include goal, target, objective or picture. When communicating expectations to followers, make sure they are simply stated, understandable, well organized, achievable and include deadlines. You should also consider if the objective is meaningful or has intrinsic value to those who are working to accomplish the aim.

Not all objectives are necessarily meaningful on their own. Some projects or tasks can be mundane parts of a larger goal that may or may not be more exciting. Leaders often need to help followers see value in the work to be done. When expectations are meaningful, individuals usually take a greater interest in the work to be accomplished.

In summary, setting expectations involves conveying a final picture of what we want accomplished, as well as the value of the objective, guidelines for goal completion and deadlines.

RECOGNIZING LEARNING STYLES

Another important thing to remember, when conveying expectations to followers, is their learning style. Each of us has our own primary way of learning information. Those ways are called Visual, Auditory or Kinesthetic.

Visual

Visual learners pay more attention to what they see. They need to be shown things. When relating to a visual type, use pictures, charts, maps and graphs to convey concepts. Use color to highlight important points in written materials. Visual learners respond to body language and facial expressions to reinforce what is learned. It helps if you can illustrate ideas as a picture for them. They like using video and computer animation to understand concepts.

Auditory

Auditory learners pay more attention to what they hear. They are natural listeners. When relating to an auditory type, pay attention to sounding good and delivering an organized verbal pitch. Auditory types prefer to hear to learn and enjoy being a participant in class discussions or debates. They like to make speeches and presentations, often read out loud and create jingles or mnemonics to aid memorization. They prefer to discuss verbally rather than write ideas. When communicating with the auditory type, use verbal analogies and stories to make points.

Kinesthetic

Kinesthetic types learn by touching and hands-on experience. They are tactile learners. When relating to a kinesthetic type, remember to give them a hands-on demonstration, let them hold relevant items and allow them to use and try things. They learn best through touch, practice and imitation. When reading, kinesthetic learners will skim first for gist, then read later for detail. They will listen to music for stimulation while studying and benefit from demonstration, labs and work outside of classroom.

When setting an expectation, delegating an assignment or presenting information try include all three learning modes to convey information to followers. As much as possible, show, tell and give them a “hands-on” experience. This greatly increases the odds they will understand and retain the information you relay.

When I was a kid I really wanted to take over the lawn mowing responsibilities at home. I finally persuaded my dad to let me take on the chore. He instructed me to get the lawn mower, gas can, rake and grass clippers, showed me how to do a safety check, fill up the gas tank and start the engine. He helped me get started and then told me he would check my results when he returned from work that evening.

After mowing the lawn that day, I waited eagerly for him to return. After he arrived, he asked me to step out onto the sidewalk in front of our home with him and to examine the lawn. “Ok, not bad for your first try,” he said. “You got most of it mowed nicely.” He then pointed out the “islands” of tall grass still standing and the fact I hadn’t trimmed along the foundation of the house and next to the trees. He had me retrieve all the tools again and helped me, with hands-on demonstration, to finish the lawn perfectly. Then we stood back and admired a job well done. “There,” he said, “That is how you want the lawn to look when you’re finished.” I saw it, experienced it and got it!

My dad used all these learning tools to transfer the idea, from his mental picture into mine, of how a lawn should look. Once that picture was placed perfectly and clearly in my mind, I was able to accomplish the same task – paint the same picture – time and time again. By telling me what to do, he engaged my ability to hear and learn through the auditory sense. He gave me a” hands-on” demonstration, during which we both did the trimming, raking, etc. until I got it right. Then he showed me how the final product should look through my visual sense. Show, tell and demonstrate. It works!
Delegation

Delegation is a way of assigning work and conveying expectations. It’s initiated by our goals, steps and objectives. It is also the art of getting things accomplished through others. By assigning work to followers, we can free up our time to focus on other important tasks that are more fitting for the leadership role.

Delegation helps followers become more involved in the work, keeps things interesting for them and increases the likelihood they will become more invested in the work of your organization. This action also increases the odds individuals will stick around for awhile. Delegation helps you become a better teacher, coach and mentor. Practicing delegation causes you, your followers and your organization to grow.

When planning to delegate, determine exactly what you are going to assign to whom and for what reason. You will need to make clear the results you expect. Also consider how you will train the chosen person. It’s important to factor in any controls or guidelines for accomplishing the objective and how and when you will follow up with the individual or team. Decide how you will establish accountability and what the consequences of success and failure will be.

Experience has shown me that leaders don’t delegate for many reasons. Those reasons include: not knowing how to delegate; thinking they can accomplish the task more quickly by doing it themselves; thinking they can do the job better than the subordinate; not having time to adequately train the individual; or, if they have a great deal of turnover, feeling the job will just come back to them anyway. And, sometimes, leaders delegate for the wrong reasons including assignments they don’t want to do (and probably no one would want to do.)

The value of delegation can be traced back thousands of years. There is even a story in the book of Exodus where Moses is warned by his father-in-law, Jethro, that he would wear himself out if he didn’t spread the management burden around by working through subordinate groups. When Jethro came to visit Moses in the desert, he was happy to see all the good things that were happening for Moses and Israel, but found that Moses was spending all of his time, from morning to evening, serving as a judge on multiple issues for his followers. Jethro advised Moses to teach the decrees and laws to others, to capable men who were able to lead others. He suggested appointing them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens of people. They will make your load lighter, Jethro told Moses, because they will share it with you.

CREATING MOTIVATION

Expectations and motivation always go hand in hand. They are inseparable. It’s impossible to have one without the other. Generally speaking, expectations that are clear, well organized, achievable, and target-dated are more likely to be met with higher levels of motivation from followers. Motivation can be defined as a want, need or desire that energizes behavior and directs it towards a goal or expectation or as a motive, inducement or incentive.

Understanding Personal Value Systems

People value many different things and each person prioritizes their values differently. For one person money may be at the top of the values list. For another, it could be title, recognition, time with family, a job well done, or any number of other items on which humans place high value. These values are important because they are often one of the keys to understanding what motivates an individual.

To further understand values, we can say that values are private, personal and individual beliefs about what’s important to us. Values are influenced by parents, peers and personal heroes. The leader who will ask, listen, observe and learn what motivates an individual will have a greater potential for triggering that motivation within the individual.

It can be helpful for you to identify your own personal values as well as those of your followers. Understanding values gives you an edge in building rapport with others. Rapport leads to stronger relationships and a position from which to understand how the follower is motivated.

Although the list of what people value is endless, people often value most such things as money, relationships, achievement, acceptance, recognition, health, independence, intelligence, winning, personal growth, education, faith, stability, self direction, pleasure, power, prestige, security, tradition, benevolence or risk. Values determine the goals we set for ourselves and how we organize our lives. Values can influence our choice of friends or partners, profession or where we work and live. Values impact our work ethic and determine how we lead others.

At this stage in our evolution, we understand that what motivates one does not motivate all. We also know that individuals are motivated by different things according to their age, maturity, values and current status. Hopefully, by now, you recognize everyone has different values and gives different weights to different values. You are not going to see eye to eye with everyone. If you take time to recognize a follower’s values and incorporate that understanding into your approach with that individual, you will probably get a better response from them when it comes time to get things done!

I once read an interview with a football coach who discussed how he handled motivation with two of his linebackers. One, whom he referred to as “Killer,” liked the thrill of sacking the quarterback. The coach could say, “Killer, go get that quarterback,” and he would do it. A second linebacker, who was a very religious
Managing to Motivate Others

Most leadership writers and teachers state that motivation comes from within. This gives the leader two basic approaches when it comes to motivating followers. One approach is to understand what’s important to the follower and use that as an inducement to generate drive. The other is to create an environment that is supportive to the follower and that provides goals, feedback, training, resources and other things that are needed to help the person unlock their potential and realize their goals. Steps that help create an environment for motivation include: setting specific and challenging goals, choosing the right leadership style for each follower and situation, managing with an eye towards people’s values and motives and praising or affirming each successful accomplishment.

EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

Deciding what form of evaluation to use is outside the scope of this text. There are, however, many companies that specialize in the research, development and sale of various tools and systems for evaluating performance. For our purposes, let’s consider three key reasons for assessing performance. The first reason is to improve the overall performance of your organization by improving the performance of individuals within that entity. The second is to determine the individual’s skills, talents and abilities, in order to place them in a role where their abilities can best be utilized. The third reason is to provide an equitable means for linking pay or reward to performance. This section focuses on how to best conduct the evaluation interview, once the evaluation results are in place, and how to give performance feedback and plan for improvement.

Preparing

As you prepare to evaluate a follower, you’ll need to decide what to evaluate. In addition to performance, will you evaluate other skills, such as human relations skills, sales skills, management ability, timeliness, attitude, or any other number of important issues? You will also want to discern when to evaluate the individual. Is there a time of day most suitable for this type of meeting? How an individual is likely to receive the evaluation and any corrective measures, may impact their performance for that day, even for days to come.

How you will evaluate is also important. Are there particular tests or forms you use when evaluating an employee in this position? Is there a hands-on demonstration that must be accomplished? Remember to stay within the scope of organizational policy and any state laws that may impact how you evaluate a person. To ensure legal compliance, remember the criteria used in the evaluation must be job-related, nondiscriminatory and conducted in a fair manner.

Meeting with the Follower

When you meet for the actual evaluation, put the person at ease and allow for some communication give and take. Although you want to exchange information that is factual and relevant to the work being evaluated, it doesn’t hurt to hear the person’s feelings and thoughts on a given topic. You may want to ask a variety of questions that allow the person to talk. You can build dialog by asking confirmation questions that elicit short, yes or no answers or new information questions that allow the follower to update you on any concerns. Ask attitudinal questions if you are seeking to learn the person’s feelings about anything related to their job or to co-workers, the public and the organization at large.

By asking agreement or next step questions, you can get the person’s input on how to best go about addressing any existing problems. You may ask for a plan to close the gap between where the individual is today and where they want to be in the future in terms of their skills and development. Let them provide feedback and, if possible, jointly decide on the next best steps.

Resolving Issues

Once the door of communication is open and vital information is out on the table, it’s time to get down to problem resolution. Identify the gap between goals, expectations and the individual’s performance, and determine what can be done to bridge the gap. Will this require a more committed effort, greater attention to detail, longer hours or specific training? As you tackle the issues and problems, your plan for improvement should emerge. You both want to walk away from the interview with a well-defined plan for improvement.

Documentation

Be sure to document the evaluation interview. Make sure the document is dated, with the correct names of yourself and the person you are evaluating. Note all important details that were discussed and any agreements made. Sign, and have the individual sign the document, indicating that he or she understands what has been relayed in this evaluation process. Give them a copy of their evaluation and keep one for your official personnel files.
Wrap up

As with any professional interaction, find ways to end the evaluation process on the best possible note. Unless you're planning to fire an employee or want them leaving feeling scolded, with their tail between their legs, you must recognize this is one of your valuable team players and you want them to feel positive. Make sure you end the meeting with a word of encouragement, direction or appreciation.

Follow up and follow through are two more key components to an effective evaluation process. Be sure to complete any next steps which you agreed to during the evaluation interview. Make sure you follow up to insure the individual does the same.

GIVING PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

Using Praise & Affirmation

A leader can use praise or affirmation to: recognize a task correctly accomplished or a job well done, affirm the individual's value, acknowledge improved performance, support the person in pursuit of a goal, inform the follower they are on the right track, encourage the individual to keep moving forward and build the follower's self esteem.

Taking time out to notice and point out what the follower has achieved is very effective. Telling an individual you liked the way they handled a customer or solved a problem or finished a task are all examples of giving an affirmation. In-the-moment feedback has been shown to help improve performance. You may also choose to use monthly, quarterly or annual employee recognition or awards to affirm an individual's value in front of their team. Remember that your outgoing behavioral types are more receptive to public praise while your reserved types prefer more personal and private recognition.

Most likely you've been lost while on the road to a particular destination and in need of a sign to show the way. The further you went, without seeing that sign, the more you felt anxious or stressed out. As soon as you saw a sign that indicated you were on the right road, and your destination was just up ahead, you felt relief.

Affirmations give employees the confidence and relief of knowing they are moving in the right direction on any given task or project. On the other hand, even if you saw a sign that said “Yeah, dummy, you missed your exit, but can turn around up ahead and get back on the right road,” you would still have felt better about the situation because you'd have known where you were and how to get to where you wanted to go.

Giving Correction, Discipline, Warnings & Reprimands

The job of correcting or disciplining or reprimanding is one that most leaders don't relish. There are many reasons for feeling awkward, reluctant or even fearful when needing to confront someone. In addition, some leaders don't correct in a clear manner, so the person does not really understand what's being conveyed. If the leader hems and haws and gives fuzzy correction, the follower may not get the message or realize its importance. Correction must be delivered confidently, directly and clearly.

Pitfalls

Some of the pitfalls leaders face when correcting workers include the need to be liked, vagueness, fear of the follower's reaction, concern with hurting the person's feelings, being too direct, being too factual without feelings or too feeling without being factual, no fore thought, bad timing or bad location.

The leader should ask themselves the following questions: “Is this discipline or warning really called for?” “Is there really a problem with performance, appearance or relations that needs to be addressed?” Or are you just going to harp on someone because they do something differently than you? Be careful about expecting everyone to do things the same way you do. Don't forget, followers are there to help you accomplish a purpose and mission. If you are too controlling, they probably won't want to work for you, or won't be able to work in a manner that meets your unrealistic expectations.

When it's time to discipline a person, you want to consider three stages or steps to this process, including how you will prepare, how you will deliver the message and what the aftermath of the discipline looks like.

Questions & Points for Preparing, Delivering & Following Through with Verbal or Written Correction:

1. Who is the person you are going to correct, discipline or reprimand – and why?
2. Have you checked facts and accuracy before meeting with the individual?
3. Draft a clear, specific statement of correction. Preparing in advance will help you focus.
4. Do you need to include a third party for this meeting?
5. When and where will you meet with the person (face to face is best)?
6. How can you start and finish the communication on a fitting note?
7. Are you proceeding in line with your organization’s policies and procedures?

8. What do you know about the individual’s personality, learning style, generational background, or any other factors that will enhance communication?

9. What specific examples can you give of events that brought about the correction? Refer to previous incidences if this is not the first time.

10. What corrective or responsive actions should the person take and by what deadline?

11. What consequences will be faced if he/she does not follow through as directed?

12. What suggestions can you make that will improve the situation?

13. Document the situation and discussion. Have the individual sign and date the documentation.

**Firing**

You should have good reasons that are well-documented when firing an employee, even if you live in an “at will” state.

**Legal Issues**

If you do have to go to court over issues of discrimination, unfair practices or firing someone, you will have taken action to protect yourself and your company by keeping documentation supporting your decisions.

I once heard an attorney tell this story. He and his associates hired an office assistant for whom they agreed to share quarterly performance review responsibilities. Not taking it too seriously, quarter after quarter, they gave the assistant excellent reviews. These reviews continued to stack up in the individual’s employment file. One day, they decided to fire the assistant for no substantiated reason. Equipped with her copies of excellent performance evaluations, the individual retaliated. I don’t remember the final outcome of the situation, but the attorney warned us all to keep good, accurate documentation on employees.

**Planning for Improvement**

The coaching cycle, from setting expectations to building motivation, evaluating performance and giving performance feedback should always be geared towards improvement for all. Here are the three key questions to ask in order to start and continue improvement.

- Where does my team need to improve as a whole?
- Where do individual team players need improvement?
- Where do I need to improve?

With this updated information you’re prepared to raise the bar on performance by setting new expectations, building individual and team motivation and continuously evaluating and giving feedback for – hopefully – a job well done!

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