



# 7 Tips for Successful Performance Coaching

Learning Guide

# The Need for Performance Coaching

Performance coaching may seem like a difficult task – many leaders avoid it whenever possible.

But the fact is, most people want to grow. Dale Carnegie research shows that when asked to choose between a leader who is satisfied with their competence and one that encourages them and helps them believe in their ability to improve, people prefer a leader who encourages them to improve by a ratio of nearly 3 to 1. Most want to develop expertise and gain new skills and that's especially true for those just starting out in the workforce.

A key aspect of any leader's role is to coach their employees to higher levels of performance, and in doing so, they help both their organization and their employee reach their goals.

Good coaching is a process that requires observation and effective communication, as well as action. It takes a strong commitment on both the part of the leader and the employee – but the results can be amazing. Demonstrating confidence in your employee's ability to do more and helping them recognize their own potential – maybe for the first time – can change the course of a person's career, and perhaps even their life.

*It may not be easy – but it is worth the effort.*



“We all have possibilities we don't know about. We can do things we don't even dream we can do.”

**- Dale Carnegie**



# Step 1

## Identify the Opportunity

We all have many areas in which we could grow. There are six ways to identify them:

1. You, their leader, can identify a developmental opportunity for another person
  2. The person can identify an opportunity for themselves
  3. A customer, vendor, or other outsider can identify an opportunity
  4. You can identify new skills needed within your team – and then the right person to provide them
  5. A situation can create an opportunity for development
  6. An assessment tool can uncover a developmental need
- Opportunities may arise from new business requirements, a project or a new role that requires additional skills. They may become apparent when a mistake occurs or in a discussion of an employee's future career goals.
  - Multiple opportunities may exist for people on your team, so prioritization becomes essential. Developmental opportunities must be balanced against current workloads and available resources.
  - Start with yourself. It can be a humbling experience, and one that heightens your empathy for those you lead. Jot down some opportunities that you see for yourself before moving on to others in your workplace. Are you the right person to point out these needs or would someone else be more effective? When might be the right time to do so?

## Step 2

### **Picture the Desired Outcome**

Once the opportunity is identified, visualize with the employee how the situation will look when the developmental goal is achieved. A clear end goal helps guide the employee throughout the process, even when the exact next steps aren't yet clear. It also provides motivation, establishing the "why" behind the need for change. This is a critical step people often skip, often leading to confusion, misunderstanding and frustration.

People with a clear vision of what the coaching is meant to help them achieve tend to move in that direction more quickly than those without one. It's essential that the employee feel ownership of that vision, so be sure to fully-involve them.

## Step 3

### **Establish the Right Attitudes**

Your role in establishing the right attitude toward change is critical in gaining the employees' commitment to change – versus just their compliance with what you've asked.

Performance coaching – by its very nature – requires change, and people's initial reaction may be to resist change. Why? It typically happens when they 1) don't see the need for the change, 2) don't want to make the change, or 3) believe that the change is not possible for them. Whenever people are asked to change without their buy-in, it creates resistance.

Good leaders take time to understand an employee's resistance and the reasons behind it. An open dialogue requires trust and effective communication – two essential skills of any successful leader.

The good news is that if you've worked together to establish the desired outcome, you can often avoid the first two issues, as employees should already see the need for the change and what's in it for them. Clearly communicating your confidence in them and their ability to achieve the change will help you with the third.

## Step 4

### **Provide the Resources**

In order for performance coaching to be successful, the appropriate resources have to be available to the employee. Discuss what resources are needed with the employee so that expectations are clear. It could be as simple as providing permission for them to engage in the development activity, or you may need to make introductions for them, secure funding for training or equipment, win support from higher up the leadership hierarchy or shift their workload to help them find time to work on it.

Your efforts to make resources available also helps reinforce the message that you believe in your employee's ability to succeed in making the change. Neglecting to provide resources signals the opposite: nothing is as frustrating as being promised something and then not getting it. It can make everyone feel like they have been set up to fail.

## Step 5

### **Practice & Skill Development**

Once the learning process begins, the employee needs opportunities to practice and apply what has been learned and receive feedback. These opportunities help the employee translate new knowledge into behaviors, and new behaviors into skills. Beyond making sure the employee has the chance to practice their new behaviors, the coach's role is to encourage, monitor skill development appropriately and hold the employee accountable for progress.

## Step 6

### Reinforce progress

Change can be uncomfortable. Without proper reinforcement, many learners gradually regress to the way they did things before. One of the biggest mistakes leaders make is to assuming that if people know how to do something, they will continue to do it.

Some of the skills leaders need to reinforce progress are:

- Empowering people to get results after they have learned new skills
- Giving the right kind of feedback
- Following up
- Handling nonperformance issues
- Addressing mistakes and people who get off track

### Reward



“Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to.”

- Dale Carnegie



## Step 7

One of the best ways to cement growth and progress is to reward it. What we reward gets repeated. What gets repeated becomes habit, and habits are far stronger than knowledge. Rewards can come in many forms, and some types are more effective than others – often depending upon the situation and the learner. Good leaders know:

- How to give sincere praise and recognition
- Positive feedback techniques
- How to recognize people's strengths as well as accomplishments
- How to ensure they are perceived as credible and convey the intended impact in the delivery



Identify key areas of opportunity and practice proven performance coaching strategies that inspire teams to achieve their top potential in our Leadership Training for Managers program.

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