

WHY PEOPLE WITH COACHES MAKE FASTER PROGRESS

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Introduction

With all the things that are remarkable about Tiger Woods, probably the most remarkable is the fact that he has a coach. (The coach may change from time to time but he always has one.) Think about it, Tiger Woods is taking constructive feedback from a golfer he could undoubtedly beat with some regularity, were he to compete against him. Imagine what it must be like to not only be the very best in the world at what you do, but to be humble enough to admit that you can get better.

Coaching is a critical tool in an employer's toolbox. As an industry we have traditionally promoted technically capable people (good at 'cows and grass') to management roles. These technically capable people are often very good at doing the job because they enjoy 'doing'. We take them away from that and expect them to be instantly good at managing people. We often give them little, or no training, in how to manage others, and often they don't even really enjoy working or managing others. What this means for employers and the industry as a whole is we have a "huge opportunity". Help these managers to understand what really is required of them as managers of people; coach, train, support and encourage them to learn the new skills they need to be a successful manager and leader.

Why do coaches help you make faster progress?

Focus and accountability

Coaching is about enabling success, which increases confidence and leads to high levels of performance and productivity.

A Coach...

- Helps you to keep focused
- Helps you to clarify what it is you are aiming for
- Helps you to identify the steps between now and what you are aiming for
- Asks you the tricky questions when they need to be asked
- Makes you accountable for what you say you will do
- Has an outside, unbiased view of the picture

Who should coach?

There are a number of choices when it comes to deciding who should do the coaching. If an employer has regular contact with the coachee, they are prepared to work on the skills they need to be good at to be a good coach, they have the time to commit to the process and are prepared to schedule in the regular meetings required, and make a commitment to make it happen, then they should be the coach themselves.

However, if the employer feels they lack the skills required they can have an outside or independent person come in to facilitate or carry out the coaching. Ideally the employer is still part of the process so they can learn the skills they need to coach their people themselves in the future. If this is not an option then an independent coach can be contracted.

What skills do I need as a coach?

Skills you should be looking for from a coach, or skills you will need if you are going to coach your own people:

- Great listening skills
- Be approachable and accessible
- Know how to ask good quality questions
- Help others find solutions instead of providing solutions
- Be committed to the process, you have to stick at it
- Take responsibility: the buck stops here
- Be assertive: seek results, not excuses or reasons
- Work with them, not on them: when they do well, you do well.

Your job isn't to correct mistakes, find fault, or assess blame. Your job is to achieve performance goals by coaching your staff to peak performance.

How do I coach my people?

People are all motivated by three things:

- achieving
- learning
- contributing

You will need to:

Notes:

- be accessible
- be a good listener
- ask good questions(the coaches best friend)
- welcome complaints
- be trustworthy

“My people won’t make a move without asking me first”. If this is you, then you aren’t doing your job as Manager, you are doing everyone else’s job.

Know how to ask quality questions

Work with your people in the decision making process – involve them in the planning. Ask them questions, to get them doing the thinking. When you ask for their input; you show respect for them and you show that you don’t think you have all the answers. Asking questions also encourages others to find their own solutions instead of you having to solve the problems. Finding their own solutions also encourages that elusive thing called “initiative”. However, asking is half the process, the other half is to listen. Questions and suggestions are positive contributions, not threats...

Tips

- Ask for opinions and listen to answers
 - Take their ideas seriously
 - Check with them before making a decision that affects them
- “Failure is success, if we learn from it”.

Coach one-on-one

It is important to schedule regular coaching sessions. The timing of these should be agreed by the coach and coachee, and should be a timeframe that is appropriate for the coachee to realistically achieve the agreed actions.

The first thing to do is to establish a clear purpose. Again this is something that should be agreed between both parties and it should be relevant. Then you need to establish the ground rules. Once you have decided the purpose and ground rules, including how often you will meet and the format of these meetings, you are ready to start.

Follow these simple steps:

1. Agree on outcomes to be achieved by the next meeting
2. Discuss and decide on the appropriate actions to achieve the outcomes (the coachee should be identifying solutions)
3. Agree on what support, training or resources the employer/coach will supply
4. The coach must deliver what they have agreed to in point 3

5. Review progress at the next meeting, identify any gaps, what caused these gaps? What worked well? The coach must give feedback.

6. Start the process again.

Coach staff so well they become confident enough to carry out plans without you, and capable enough to do it well. When you let them take the lead, good things happen:

- you show your respect for the employee
- you show that you don't think you have to do it all
- you open yourself up to the possibility they could do the job better than you would.

Solve problems together; if it is your plan not theirs, they probably won't own it.

If you include employees in the problem-solving process, you get more motivated, confident employees, you also get better solutions.

Don't act out of anger, acting out of anger hurts your relationship with the employee. The only thing the employee will learn from this is that you are a hard ass, now they are angry too, and embarrassed and ashamed. Feeling anger is natural (and frustration and disappointment), but don't let it control your actions. Calm yourself, remove yourself, do the right thing not the natural thing (use your head).

Train them

Prepare to present, rehearse, demonstrate, let them do it. Remember they haven't learnt it until they can do it without you.

Give feedback – positive feedback

Encourage the behaviour you want. Too often managers ignore competence and focus only on sub-par performance, or unacceptable behaviour. Encourage peak performance by rewarding it. Many employees work hard, without any meaningful feedback other than the annual performance review. Give your employees regular, meaningful feedback on their work.

Tip

- If it ain't broke, don't fix it
- If it is broke, let them fix it. They'll take ownership and be more motivated
- If they can't fix it, fix it with them
- This equals leadership and teamwork

Notes:

Summary

I have never met Tiger Woods so I don't know for sure why he has a coach, but I'd like to think he has a coach for the same reason all high-performing individuals have one. Those who have a coach have one because they believe, firstly that they cannot see their own mistakes, and secondly, if they are not getting better they are getting worse. So take responsibility, be assertive and work with your people, not on them. Because when they do well, you do well!

So if it is good enough for Tiger Woods to have a coach, what about you?