

How Does a Leader Coach Employees?

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As a leader in your organization, is it your impression that your job is to tell your employees what needs to be done? My experience is different from that. I think most employees know what should be done. They just need occasional support from the boss.

I encourage leaders to become good coaches. Rather than telling employees what to do, coaches ask how they can support their efforts. For some, it's a hard transition!

When I talk about being a coach, most leaders think immediately of an athletic coach. This reinforces the image of someone telling the players what to do. I offer a different picture. Consider a stage coach like you see in a western movie. That kind of coach takes people from where they are now to where they want to go—a much better perspective for a business coach!

Employees want to be successful, but don't always know how to make that happen. So they welcome collaborating with someone they know has their best interests in mind.

Coaching involves helping an employee size up the situation, get clear on the desired outcomes, consider options for getting there, choose the option with the greatest probability of success, or prepare to execute the necessary action.

Size up the situation. We all see the world through our own filters and experiences. Things are not always as they seem. Your employee may want your perspective on what happened that created the circumstances that now exist.

Get clear on the desired outcomes. Any action which might be taken has both short-term and long-term outcomes. The tendency we all have is to go for what will provide immediate satisfaction, yet there are always long-term effects. Your employee may want your help in determining what long-term relationship and reputation you want to establish.

Consider options. There are always multiple ways to do anything. Unfortunately, we often get stuck on the first idea that comes to mind. Experienced individuals know that the initial idea isn't always the best one. When your employee comes to you and says, "What do you think I should do?" avoid the temptation to give an answer. Instead, consider responding, "I'm not sure, but I'll help you think of some possibilities!"

Choose the option with the highest probability of success. Nobody knows "the right thing" for every situation. And since nothing in this world is guaranteed, we should make our choices based on the most likely results of our actions. That requires an evaluation of probabilities, and collaborative thinking helps when speculating what might happen with each potential action step.

Prepare to execute the chosen action. Sometimes the preferred behavior is one the employee has never experienced. Offer to role-play the situation, being willing to act out whatever part the employee desires. Maybe the employee prefers to practice the anticipated behaviors, with you being the other person involved. Or perhaps the employee wants to play the other person, preferring to see how you would handle whatever hard questions might be encountered.

If you've coached a little league baseball team or your child's soccer team, you'll find that coaching adults is very different. Coaching children involves a lot of teaching and giving direction. Coaching adults requires asking questions that stimulate thinking and the assumption of responsibility.

The individual will grow in both awareness and skill level if he or she is generating the options and making the decisions. You can help by creating an environment of trust and support!

Dennis Hooper is a certified leadership development coach, helping leaders be more effective in building future leaders. To contact Dennis, call (478)-988-0237 or e-mail at dhooper2@juno.com.