A “COACH APPROACH” IS AN ESSENTIAL MANAGEMENT SKILL

A “coach approach” is an essential management skill. It focuses on developing and maximizing employees’ abilities and talents to achieve the best possible organizational performance. It may be used for individual employees as well as teams. The “coach approach” is centered on openness, curiosity, collaboration and support of others.

Managers who use a “coach approach” ask powerful questions (open-ended), actively listen, facilitate solution based thinking, and provide regular and honest feedback to support growth. A “coach approach” is successful when relationships between the employee and the coach manager are founded on respect and trust. It means that employees’ ideas are sought and supported. It also means that there are times when the coach manager needs to work with the employee / team to discover what went wrong, and what should be done differently the next time.

Initially when using the “coach approach” a little more time may be needed to get something done quickly, however the benefits outweigh that drawback. Many of today’s employees prefer working for a manager who uses this approach. The relationship between the employee / team and the coach manager is usually stronger. Typically employees are more engaged, empowered to contribute and committed to the organization. In turn, the organizational culture becomes more open, transparent and collaborative.

“Coach Approach” Essential Skills

Active Listening
- Listen with attention, curiosity and empathy
- Listen for potential, not problems
- Let go of your own filters, perceptions, biases and assumptions
- Focus on the employee and their goal
- Listen at a deeper level – body language and meaning
- Reflect, summarize, clarify, reframe
- Silence enables the employee to think. Thinking leads to insights, solutions.

Powerful Questioning
- Ask open ended questions – start broad, then narrow to generate focus
- Use closed questions sparingly to gather facts
- Avoid leading questions and judgemental comments
- Invite self-assessment to raise awareness

Coaching Can Happen Anywhere and Anytime
- On the spot coaching
- Planned coaching session
- Coaching by phone
- Coaching over coffee
- Coaching via Skype and / or email

Potential Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Lack of Time
Coaching is an investment of time and will eventually pay off when you have developed confident and motivated staff. By not finding the time to coach staff sends a powerful message that you are always too busy for them. Plan to coach and protect the time.

Judging
You should never use “weaknesses” revealed by staff to form a judgement, or you will quickly lose their trust. Coaching is about openly discussing positive and negative performance and moving forward, not being judgemental.

Telling
A major pitfall! Sometimes telling is appropriate, but remember the solution is far more effective and embedded if the coachee has come up with it themselves. It is far more likely to work.

“...may be harder to give up instructing that it is to learn to coach. Coaching is unlocking people’s potential to maximize their own performance.” – Sir John Whitmore.

Coachee Agrees to Actions then Does Nothing
Check whether the coachee is able to carry out actions. Notice what could get in the way and coach more to resolve.
**Goal**
Help clarify the goal. Identify what needs to be achieved. Agree areas for discussion in the conversation.

What is the aim for this discussion?
What does that look like?
What will that enable you to do?
What will you have that you don’t have now?
Imagine 3 months from now, all obstacles are removed and you have achieved this: What do you see/hear/feel?
What new elements are in place? What is different?

**Reality**

What is happening currently?
How important is this to you?
On a scale of 1-10, if an ideal situation is 10, what number are you at now? What number would you like to be at?
What impact is this having on you?
How does this impact other areas of your work?
What are you doing that takes you towards your goal?
What are you doing that is getting in the way of your goal?
Who else does it affect?

**Options**
Help to find out what is possible. Brainstorm many options. Assess pros and cons. Help find a way forward. Only offer ideas after you have engaged them to come up with their own idea.

What could you do? What ideas do you have?
What alternatives do you have? Is there anything else?
What has worked in the past?
What steps could you take?
Who could help you with this?
Where could you find out the information?
How could you do that? What is the best option for you?

**Will**
Help to determine a way forward & commit to best actions. Identify possible obstacles to overcome. Discuss the plan of action and support.

What will you do?
When will you do it?
Who will you talk to?
Where will you go?
Is there anything you need to put in place before that?
How committed are you to taking that action?
What will it take for you to commit to that?

“As with any new skill, attitude, style, or belief, adopting a coaching ethos requires commitment, practice, and some time before it flows naturally and its effectiveness is optimized.”
- John Whitmore