

Coaching for Excellence

“
A Coach must keep everyone on the team in touch with present-moment realities—knowing where they stand, knowing where they’re falling short of their potential, and knowing it openly and fairly.”

—Pat Riley, *The Winner Within*

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The Changing Playing Field

The playing field is changing in our business world. Changes are driven by four key forces outlined below.

Emergence of the Information Age

- Emerging technology creates higher expectations for productivity and responsiveness
- Ready availability and transmission of data creates information overload

Greater Competition

- Business improvements and innovations
- Multinational consolidation
- Entrepreneurial spirit

Increasing Customer Demands

- More choices for consumers
- Customers want it all: price, quality, service
- Word of mouth is faster via Internet

Volatile Workforces

- Less employee loyalty
- Diverse workforces
- Varied generational needs
- Labor shortages

Because of these, supervisors are under great pressure to do more with less. They are expected to be a liaison between employees and management, to increase productivity, to increase quality or service, and to build employee morale. To do this, many turn to the example set by those who serve the role of a coach-coaches of winning sports teams, voice coaches, and mentors in all areas of personal and professional development.

While the challenges are great, supervisors who can adapt and learn to coach for better results become extremely valuable to their companies. Coaching is an essential skill for all supervisors, and those who master it have learned key behaviors and characteristics that produce positive results.

The Best and Worst Supervisors

Think of the absolutely worst supervisor you ever worked with or knew about. What did the person do and what was the person's character? Then, think of the best supervisor you worked for or knew about. How was this person different? In both cases, describe the coaching behaviors and character of the person. Then compare the behaviors you listed with those on the next page.

Worst Behavior

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Character

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Best Behavior

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Character

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Coaching Behaviors of Supervisors

Research in work settings have established that these are the coaching behaviors of the least effective and most effective supervisors:

Worst Coaches

- Set unclear expectations
- Set vague goals/standards
- Give limited or vague feedback
- Observe performance irregularly
- Provide only negative feedback
- Give limited positive recognition
- Offer little training
- Give sporadic advice
- Spend more time on technical or administrative matters
- Listen ineffectively
- Have poor people skills

Best Coaches

- Establish clear expectations
- Set clear goals/standards
- Give regular feedback
- Observe performance regularly
- Give constructive feedback
- Recognize and reward accomplishments
- Provide regular training
- Give helpful advice
- Invest the time to help
- Listen effectively
- Have good people skills

Leadership Character

Kouzes and Posner are researchers and consultants who conducted an intense study of leadership in the 1980s and 1990s. Their study identified behavior and characteristics of the most successful leaders. Their results were published in the book *The Leadership Challenge*.

As a supervisor, you will be a leader of people. Notice the coaching characteristics you identified in the Worst/Best exercise. Consider how they relate to the top five traits created by Kouzes and Posner as described below.

1. Honesty

This involves ethics and integrity; people whose word is steadfast

2. Forward Looking

This involves longer-term thinking, not just short-term thinking

3. Inspiring

This means the ability to motivate or “fire people up”

4. Competent

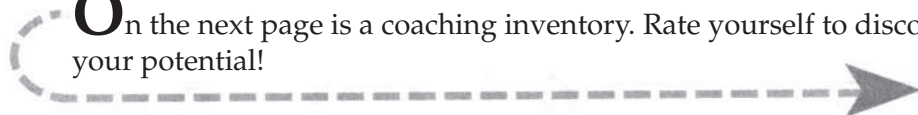
Leaders are students of the game and are knowledgeable or willing to learn

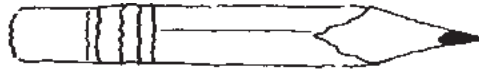
5. Fair-Minded

This involves treating people consistently and, again, doing what’s right

Who you are speaks louder than what you say. If you want people to put in extra time, *you* have to. If you need more teamwork, *you* be a team player. If communication problems exist, be a good listener. If more training is needed, *you* attend also. If respect is an issue, give others respect. If a decision needs to be made, make it.

On the next page is a coaching inventory. Rate yourself to discover your potential!





COACHING FOR EXCELLENCE INVENTORY

The behaviors of the best coaches translate into the practices below. Using the scale shown, rate yourself in these areas in terms of how often you engage in the following behaviors.

1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Always

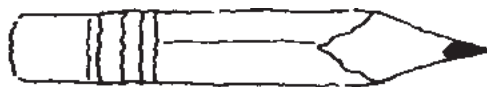
Be honest with yourself and answer as you think you really are, not what you should be.

- _____ 1. I discuss agreed-upon goals and expectations with my employees.
- _____ 2. I set aside uninterrupted and private time to meet with my employees.
- _____ 3. I review my employee's goals and expectations at the start of each of my coaching sessions.
- _____ 4. I encourage open discussion when I hold coaching meetings.
- _____ 5. I ask my employees for their input when reviewing their performance.
- _____ 6. I listen to and paraphrase what my employees are trying to say.
- _____ 7. I carefully assess all factors that affect my employees' performance results.
- _____ 8. I regularly observe my employees in action with customers or others.
- _____ 9. I recognize and reward high performance.
- _____ 10. I give regular and immediate feedback to my employees in a constructive manner.
- _____ 11. I listen to my employees' feedback and concerns before giving my own.
- _____ 12. I am specific about behaviors and tasks when I give advice or guidance.
- _____ 13. I provide feedback that is appropriate to my employees' situations, performance level, and goals.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

- _____ 14. I teach my employees new skills clearly and systematically.
- _____ 15. I develop specific action plans to help improve my employees' skills and results.
- _____ 16. I gradually give more responsibility to my employees so they can grow.
- _____ 17. I ensure that my employees understand and agree to their action plans.
- _____ 18. I negotiate project tasks and deadlines with my experienced employees.
- _____ 19. I set follow-up meetings at the conclusion of my coaching meetings.
- _____ 20. I make sure that my follow-up coaching meetings take place.



COACHING FOR EXCELLENCE INVENTORY: SCORING

Write in your score for each number in the space below. Put a plus sign (+) by the top five numbers and a check (✓) by the lowest two. Then answer the questions.

Step 1: Review goals and expectations.

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 Total _____

Step 2: Assess level of performance.

4. _____
 5. _____
 6. _____
 7. _____
 8. _____
 Total _____

Step 3: Provide feedback/ guidance.

9. _____
 10. _____
 11. _____
 12. _____
 13. _____
 14. _____
 Total _____

Step 4: Develop action plans.

15. _____
 16. _____
 17. _____
 18. _____
 Total _____

Step 5: Establish follow-up.

19. _____
 20. _____
 Total _____

How can you make sure you take the time to coach? _____

What are your strengths? (list 3—5) _____

How can you coach even more effectively? (list 2—3 ways) _____

The Coaching Process

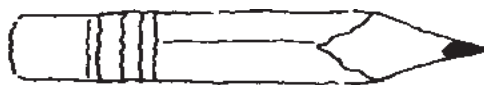
There are two major types of coaching: formal and informal. By embracing the coaching concept, supervisors get more done in less time by helping the employees succeed. Coaching is the art of high performance. If you practice informal and formal coaching, employees may not like some of your decisions, but they will still respect you and get the job done.

Informal Coaching

Informal coaching involves the day-to-day relationship between the supervisor and the employee. First of all, is the relationship built on trust? All employees have what is called an emotional bank account. Author Steven Covey describes this in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. It is either positive or negative. If it is positive, trust is present, and results and performance are good. If it is negative, trust is absent, and performance often suffers.

Just as with a real savings account, an emotional bank account requires deposits before you make withdrawals. So what do you do to make the emotional bank account positive and increase trust? Think about what *you* would want from a supervisor.

Think about all the principles and practices we have discussed so far. Many of these points under informal coaching are examples of the techniques and strategies you have been working on throughout *Excellence in Supervision*. If these kinds of actions are everyday practices, you'll create a surplus in the emotional bank accounts of employees. This is crucial because, at times, you'll have to make the tougher decision: change work hours, require overtime, discipline an employee, follow through on an unpopular decision by management, or act in opposition to an employee's idea of what is best. These are withdrawals, often viewed negatively. With a surplus of positives in the emotional bank account, employees will stay motivated.



POSITIVE PRACTICES

Put a check (✓) next to the items below that make sense to you. Notice all these actions can be done in a few minutes of time every day or over time.

- ☐ Greet the employee daily
- ☐ Talk about nonbusiness matters of interest to the employee
- ☐ Have lunch with employees
- ☐ Demonstrate courtesy and respect
- ☐ Learn and use people's names
- ☐ Be a good listener
- ☐ Have a sense of humor
- ☐ Deal with performance issues
- ☐ Do what you say you will do
- ☐ Treat people fairly
- ☐ Be considerate and understanding when dealing with personal matters
- ☐ Be positive
- ☐ Work side-by-side with employees on an important project
- ☐ Encourage others
- ☐ Give recognition for progress and results
- ☐ Help out when necessary
- ☐ Have some fun at work
- ☐ Buy someone a soft drink or coffee
- ☐ Other: _____

Formal Coaching

From the scoring sheet for the Coaching for Excellence Inventory (page 69), you'll notice there are five steps to the coaching process. This is for formal coaching. Formal coaching means talking one-on-one with employees to help them improve performance. Coaching involves a mutual problem-solving effort and it usually takes 30 to 60 minutes. Spending a few minutes on a problem isn't formal coaching, it's more likely just *telling* the employee what to do!

Another goal of formal coaching is developing employees' skills at thinking through problems and identifying solutions on their own. As a result, in the future employees will come to you with solutions to problems, not just the problems.

Under what circumstances do you do formal coaching? First, do it to help poor or marginal performers do better. Second, do it to help a good performer excel or handle a delegated project. And third, use it in times of change. Remember, you have to schedule coaching sessions or you will never seem to find time for them.

An office supervisor had an employee who generally met expectations except for the accounts-receivable goal. She usually missed timelines. After learning how to coach, the supervisor met with this employee weekly for 30 minutes. Following the coaching steps, the supervisor helped the employee meet the goal. The employee had some ideas for the action plan that helped integrate all her work. Afterward, monthly one-on-one goal meetings kept the employee on track.

The Formal Coaching Process

Here are more details of the formal coaching process.

Preparation:

1. Set clear goals and expectations. (Identify the employee's skill, motivation, and performance level.)
2. Do your homework and review the employee's current performance.
3. Provide regular performance feedback. Use informal coaching strategies regularly.
4. Set aside the time for a coaching meeting (30–60 minutes). Create a positive, friendly atmosphere.

The Coaching Process:

1. Review the goal/expectation. (Start the coaching session by clarifying the goal. Ask the employee to describe it.)
2. Assess the current level of performance from employee input. Ask the four key questions below. You will ask other questions, but these are the core questions:
 - Overall, how are you doing?
 - What's working?
 - What isn't working?
 - What can you do better or differently?Compare the employee responses to your observations and knowledge of their results.
3. Provide feedback and guidance. Comment on what the employee says.
4. Develop action plans with employee input. Give your ideas for the plan. Put the ideas for improvement in writing, add your recommendations, and gain agreement.
5. Establish follow-up steps. Summarize the discussion and set a specific date and time for the next meeting.

COACHING WORKSHEET: SAMPLE

Name: Bill Jones Date: 2/15

1. **Performance Goals:** What is the key goal we are working on?
 - Improving the customer satisfaction rating to 95% or higher.
2. **Assess performance:**

Employee Input: Supervisor, ask four key questions—take notes on comments

- Overall, how are you doing?
- What's working well?
- What isn't working?
- What will you do better or differently?

Observations/results: Supervisor, note your observations of performance and any available data, such as customer survey results

- Experiencing fewer complaints
- Rating of 93.5 (last quarter)
- Evidence that employee is following through on action plan

3. **Provide feedback/guidance:**
 - How about follow-up calls after customer contact?
 - No thank-you notes

4. **Develop action plans:**

Employee's ideas:

1. Act more courteously—say please, thank you, etc.
2. Greet promptly—in less than one minute

Supervisor's ideas:

3. Do follow-up calls—within two days
4. Send thank-you notes—daily

5. **Establish follow-up steps**

Next meeting 2/28 at 3:00 p.m.

COACHING WORKSHEET

Using the preceding sample for guidance, fill this out for an employee situation you are currently involved in. For the purpose of this exercise, complete as much of the worksheet as possible, whether you have talked to the employee yet or not. As you begin implementing this technique with all employees, use this format as an outline for notetaking. Always give a copy of your notes to the employee.

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. Performance Goals:

2. Assess performance:

Employee input:

Observations/results:

3. Provide feedback/guidance:

4. Develop action plans:

5. Establish follow-up steps:

CASE STUDY 4

1. Doug is a new employee in the advertising department. On his first day on the job, his supervisor, Kelli, met him for breakfast. After breakfast, they returned to the office and Kelli showed him around and made introductions. Kelli then met with Doug to review the day's agenda, his job duties, expectations, and goals. Doug had some questions, which they discussed. Afterwards, Kelli took Doug to personnel to handle necessary paperwork.

How do you think Doug felt about his first day? _____

What has been your experience in this type of situation? _____

How do you plan to handle an employee's first day? _____

2. Ross is an experienced employee and a good performer. He's a financial consultant for a bank and is a loyal employee. However, he can do better. His new supervisor, Pat, has been meeting with all his employees one-on-one. In Pat's meeting with Ross, Pat explained his plan to do coaching. Ross reacted negatively and said, "I'm doing the best I can." In the first coaching session, Ross wasn't very talkative.

Why do you think Ross reacted this way? _____

How do you engage someone who isn't very talkative in a meeting?

What should Pat do? _____

Compare your responses to the author's suggestions in the back of the book.

Strategies for Effective Coaching

Review the strategies below. Put a check (✓) next to the ones you will attempt and add them to your action plans.

- ☐ **Discuss the results of the Coaching for Excellence Inventory with your manager or another supervisor.**

During the review, talk about strengths and areas to improve. Brainstorm ideas. Discuss different ways to help employees. Resist the temptation to think that “this doesn’t apply to our situation.” Coaching works! Excellent supervisors everywhere use coaching techniques.

- ☐ **Review how you have applied informal coaching.**

At the end of a work week, analyze what happened. What results did you achieve? Which employees had problems? Why? What worked? What didn’t work? What can you learn or relearn? What will you do better or differently next week?

- ☐ **Complete a formal coaching session with an employee and document the results using the Coaching Worksheet in this book.**

What did you learn? If you’re comfortable, discuss the process with your manager or another supervisor. Remember, set high standards for yourself and continue practicing these skills and improving your own performance as a coach.

- ☐ **Reward yourself!**

Becoming an excellent supervisor is not easy. Achieving excellence is difficult. Others, including your manager, may tell you not to waste your time coaching. There are obstacles. With persistence and determination, you’ll experience the benefits—pride and self-satisfaction, as well as improved production and employee morale. So reward yourself! Go out to dinner, buy yourself something, relax!

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