

## Coaching Can Make the Difference

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

There’s a reason why this adage has stood the test of time. By only meeting someone’s immediate need – food – you are disregarding the fact that they will need to continue to eat every single day. If they aren’t given the tools, training and support they need to catch their own fish when they get hungry, then they might as well be, well, a fish out of water.

This same concept holds true in the workplace, and it’s the reason why more and more business leaders are talking about the importance of coaching. An important extension of talent development, coaching is essentially about teaching employees how to fish – and it can play a significant role in a company’s success. According to [Bersin by Deloitte](#), “A coaching culture is the practice that’s most highly correlated with business performance, employee engagement and overall retention.”

But what exactly does coaching mean? Coaching provides an opportunity for leaders to support their employees in order to help them grow and learn. Rather than focusing solely on manager discussions of pre-established performance metrics and progress toward them, coaching works to strengthen the relationship between an employee and a manager – a critical component of employee engagement – by creating an environment that empowers employees to take control of their own individual development.

While there are lots of executive coaches who can provide guidance to a company’s leaders about how best to develop a particular skill or behavior, the reality is that anyone within an organization can play a coaching role. Most importantly, coaches need to remember to take an “ask, don’t tell” approach to interactions with employees. Similar to the fishing axiom, the coach’s role is

primarily to ask thought - provoking questions that help the other person gain the understanding they need to learn and progress in their career.

In many cases, organizations choose to combine coaching with mentoring initiatives, which tend to involve a counselor - like relationship between a mentor and mentee and does not typically involve the employee's manager directly. In both cases, however, the employee and the manager experience a number of benefits, from improved team dynamics and enhanced productivity to skill development and continuous performance improvements.

To help your managers and staff become more proficient in coaching, here are some tips to keep in mind when talking to leaders:

1. Keep it casual. Unlike other components of performance management, coaching is meant to be more relaxed and informal.
2. Keep it timely. In-the- moment conversations are what coaching is all about, so find on-the-job learning opportunities as much as possible and stay in regular communication with employees.
3. Keep it open-ended. Thought-provoking questions start with statements like "tell me about a time when..." or "how did you..." , which require more reflection and discussion by the employee.
4. Keep it positive. Steer the conversation toward actions the employee can take to help find solutions to the problem, rather than rehashing what went wrong.
5. Keep it about the employee. Focus on the employee's individual strengths and find opportunities for the employee to succeed using their own ideas and talents.

Today's thriving companies recognize the benefits of developing a strong coaching culture, especially as it relates to increased employee engagement,

which can lead to improved business results. Incorporating a few of these tips into your managers' repertoire of skills can help them coach more effectively and ultimately improve the performance of your teams.

