

## Helix Top Tips – for developing a ‘coaching culture’ at work

### **Coaching employees helps to improve individual performance, deal with under-performance and improve productivity.**

This is according to UK organisations surveyed last year by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). In 2006, their learning and development survey found 8 in 10 organisations use coaching as part of their people development.

### **Coaching is a powerful tool for encouraging people to solve problems themselves.**

Coaching now comes in a number of guises and is carried out by a myriad of providers, from sports coaches and occupational psychologists to HR and training professionals. But developing the skills to coach your staff in-house, is a great way to develop great managers.

Despite the different approaches to coaching, there is some consensus about what it is.

- It is aimed at resolving specific areas or issues.
- It is one to one, and focussed on personal development.
- It is aimed at improving performance and developing skills.
- It depends on excellent listening and questioning skills.
- It requires honest and constructive feedback and an environment of trust.
- It is likely to be challenging for those being coached.

There is also widespread agreement that coaching, when introduced and managed well, can be immensely beneficial to organisations and individuals alike.

### **John Lewis Partnership has been training its managers to coach, as part of its strategy to improve business performance, since 2003.**

- In 2005 the company reported that staff turnover was down. The retailer had achieved first and second place respectively in customer satisfaction surveys by Verdict Research and Which? Report.
- Crucially, for longer term improvements, internal surveys indicated significant increases in the numbers of staff who felt their managers encouraged them to take more responsibility, that their manager helped them do their job better, and that they were trained well to do their jobs.
- These factors point towards even more staff commitment and higher performance in the future.

When Theo Paphitis and Peter Jones of The Dragon's Den (BBC) bought Red Letter Days out of administration last year, they commissioned coaching and training to address rock bottom staff morale. The solutions challenged management to take more responsibility for staff issues and staff turnover was reduced by 80%.

Both these examples involved building a coaching culture, and developing the skills within management so that coaching becomes a part of normal day to day activity.

### **1. Be clear about what coaching will bring you**

Developing the coaching skills of your managers won't be a cheap exercise. It won't be quick either. So make sure you're not just jumping on the coaching bandwagon. If you are unclear about what benefits it will bring you – stop - invest the time to plan and consider your desired outcomes and set objectives. The Children's Society for example are using coaching to help change their culture from one of 'command and control' to collective leadership.

### **2. Don't be soft on measuring results**

This naturally follows on from setting clear objectives but how do you measure something perceived as 'intangible' like coaching? One client recently came to us with the notion of 'making things better and making staff happier'. Developing this into more specific measures such as staff retention, contribution towards profitability and career progression, will give the client some tangible criteria against which they can measure their return on investment. Prioritise your desired outcomes, be realistic about what you will achieve in the short, medium and long term, and with time and perseverance, you'll achieve more.

### **3. Plan for the culture shock**

Development needs are often addressed as a knee-jerk reaction once a year at appraisal time. Employees may assume the only solution is to attend a training course. Coaching, by contrast is an ongoing process, and this shift in approach can feel uncomfortable for some managers.

The transition to a culture where workplace coaching is part of a manager's daily routine may well need to be managed centrally. It will certainly need senior management support, and would undoubtedly benefit from champions and supporters throughout the business. As the word

spreads that it really works, and as managers begin to recognise the results, the value of coaching will sell itself.

#### **4. Coach your coaches**

As with most management activity, encouraging managers to coach should in itself be managed. A common approach can be beneficial – make coaching skills a key business objective, and part of continuous professional development. But this is not about a homogenised cloning of managers - this is about requiring all managers to put the same effort into developing the capability of their staff. Acknowledge that some will find it harder than others. Not everyone will be a natural with coaching skills, so this should be recognised in management appraisals.

Your senior managers and directors may benefit from coaching too - here coaches from outside the organisation have a key role to play.

All managers and staff should feel they are able to reap the benefits. Coaching should not be optional for managers or their reports will lose the opportunity to succeed. Celebrate the success as I've said, but put the sanction there too.

#### **5. Keep it going**

Once you start, regardless of the size of the organisation or numbers of managers involved, one of the challenges is keeping the momentum going. Shifting to a culture of coaching where managers coach their teams as a matter of course cannot be treated as a 'roll-out' or an initiative. The risk of being superseded by the next initiative or new fad is ever present. Go back to Tip One and decide if it is really for you before you begin.

Plan how to deal with resistance you might encounter. Some of this resistance might be intentional and disruptive. Some might be driven simply by a lack of knowledge or experience. Some might be cultural inertia. It's also worth noting that the biggest critics of activity such as coaching are often those who may well benefit the most. Make it

mandatory and part of objectives, use non threatening benefits selling, and be transparent about the outcomes.

Internal coaching should be only one part of your overall development strategy. It will be more effective if it is integrated with existing management, technical and soft skills training. This way a fresh and impartial perspective will always be available.

## **6. Report results and celebrate success**

Tips 1 and 2 are all about starting out with a purpose, and having a sense of priority. It makes sense then to actively seek out those tangible results. The benefits need to be both clearly visible and celebrated by all concerned. If you don't achieve the anticipated results - investigate, report and make changes so that benefits can be realised. We can learn from our mistakes – but we so often miss out on the learning from our successes. It's great for motivation too.

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