



A Manager's Guide to Coaching

Simple and Effective Ways to Get the Best Out of Your Employees

by Brian Emerson and Anne Loehr

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Take-Aways

- Executive coaches help people reach “higher effectiveness by creating a dialogue that leads to awareness and action.”
- Coaching helps staffers address behaviors and outlooks that hurt their productivity.
- Managers can learn to coach their staffers, instead of turning to outside coaches.
- An employee’s success depends on “Aptitude, Attitude and Resources.” Attitude matters most. In fact, a better outlook can make up for shortfalls in skills or materials.
- The “W.I.N. B.I.G.” process outlines steps manager-coaches can use with their staff members.
- In the W.I.N. stage, ask probing questions to help employees develop self-awareness about issues that are holding them back at work.
- In the B.I.G. stage, help them plan and institute problem-solving action.
- Effective coaches believe in employees’ potential, remain detached, heed their own instincts, set an easy atmosphere, don’t bog down and show alternative perspectives.
- Coaches must “listen,” pay attention, offer “feedback” and “celebrate” victories.
- Coaching offers employees an exciting journey of personal and career growth.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
8	9	7	7

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Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) How to coach your employees, 2) What coaching can accomplish and 3) How to help employees overcome characteristics that impede their work.

Recommendation

This tremendously useful book by two seasoned executive coaches, Anne Loehr and Brian Emerson, expertly explains what coaching is, how it functions and how managers can learn to put it to work to improve employees' productivity and morale. Although every member of your staff is surely pumping hard to stay employed, get ahead and do well, many people may be unaware of attitudes or behaviors that are holding them back or jeopardizing their careers. That's where a good coach plays a crucial role. The authors delve into coaching's methods, explain its benefits, and offer thoughtful instructions and examples. The last third of the book is devoted to specific questions to ask while coaching. How you'll react to the writing style, which is generally clear and serviceable, depends on if you think that "coachee" is a real word and that "everyone does their work" is good enough on the grammar front. Either way, *getAbstract* heartily recommends this straightforward, practical book to managers who want to be productive coaches.

Abstract

"The Success Equation"

Coaching is a billion-dollar industry, yet few businesspeople know exactly what executive coaches do. In fact, they help workers identify and repair attitudes and behaviors that hurt their productivity so they can take action to meet their professional goals. Managers can learn to provide coaching to their staff members.

To do good work, employees need three crucial assets:

1. **"Aptitude"** – The professional skills to do the job. "Aptitude is about more than someone's innate talent"; it covers the entire toolbox a staffer brings to the job.
2. **"Attitude"** – The motivation, determination and focus to work efficiently.
3. **"Available resources"** – The "tools, equipment and time" to complete assigned tasks.

Most employees possess the skills they need to do their work. That's why they have their jobs. Most organizations furnish staffers with the resources they need. However, for many reasons, employees may lose their drive. A lack of aptitude or equipment can undermine a person's attitude, but a good attitude "can compensate for deficiencies in aptitude or resources." Thus, "attitude is the make-or-break factor of the success equation."

This is where coaching comes to bear. A manager who learns to be a coach can help his or her staffers improve their attitudes. Coaching helps a worker "step back, look in the mirror and grapple with the tough questions." Contemporary employees expect their firms to help them develop – and that involves coaching. Some managers mistakenly believe that coaching isn't worth their time, but since poor employee attitudes can kill productivity, managers who don't coach are not, in fact, using their time well. To begin, break down the definition of coaching – that is, helping people be more effective by setting up a "dialogue that leads to self-awareness and action" – and consider its components:

"Coaching involves helping another person gain the confidence, motivation and drive to complete the task at hand."

"Your goal is to help the person clarify what they really want...and who they want to be as they move in that direction."

“The coach focuses 100% on the coachee’s words, emotions and body language.”

“The coach holds up a ‘mirror’ to the coachee, explaining to the coachee what the coach sees in the situation at hand. The coach lets the coachee interpret the data.”

“Managers are good at fixing things, so they may fall into the trap of asking about the details so that they can find answers for the coachee. That’s not your job as a coach.”

“Your job is to help the coachee see the bigger picture of their issue and help them believe they know everything they need to know to find the solution.”

- **“Dialogue”** – When people share a dialogue, they do not try to prove their points or outwit and manipulate each other. Instead, they try to reach mutual understanding. In a coaching dialogue, help your staffer identify what stands in his or her way at work. Initiate the dialogue and move it along with intelligent questions and careful listening. Coaching is a “two-way conversation” in which you will offer “questions and...support.” In this process, your staffer will gain insights about making a positive attitude change.
- **Helpfulness** – As a manager who wants to function as a coach, you must have genuine empathy for your employees and want them to achieve their goals. However, you are not responsible for fixing someone’s problem, whatever it may be. This defeats the purpose of coaching. Instead, your goal is to help people perceive how to fix their own problems.
- **“Awareness”** – Staff members can benefit from coaching only if they can become cognizant of their personal obstacles. With coaching, they become their own teachers.
- **“Action”** – The whole point of coaching is for employees to take action to achieve their professional goals. Without such action, coaching is just empty dialogue. Coaching works because of its attention to awareness and action, the prime components of emotional intelligence and the essential elements of self-management and good relationships.
- **“Effectiveness”** – Coaching takes time and moves at an easygoing pace. To help someone become more productive, you must focus exclusively on that person during your coaching sessions. The employee’s payoff is obvious improvement. Your payoff as a manager and coach is a more productive, engaged, motivated staffer. You both win.

Although coaching often centers on concerns related to emotions, it is not therapy in any way. Therapists explore the primal origins of people’s emotional issues. Coaching explores employees’ lack of motivation, confidence and concentration to help them find ways to improve these shortfalls and become more productive. Coaching is not a cure-all, but it can help people leave mental slumps behind and change negative attitudes that block their potential. Make one core lesson very clear: A staffer must hold himself or herself accountable for positive change to occur.

“W.I.N. B.I.G.”

To coach your employees, use the W.I.N. B.I.G. formula. The W.I.N. activities, which “build awareness,” are:

- **“Wonder about root cause”** – In this “discovery” phase, ask questions to get the employee to identify his or her inner issue. Is it demotivation, lack of self-confidence, ennui or something else? Design your questions to help the person attain self-awareness, not to “solve” his or her problem. Coaching is not fixing. Don’t bog down in nitty-gritty facts or “he said, she said” reports. Good questions to ask at this stage include: “How does this really affect you?” “What’s underneath all this?” and “Which of your buttons are really getting pushed here?” Avoid “why” questions. You’re a coach, not a judge.
- **“Investigate wants”** – This stage focuses on “visioning” because people whose goals are clear stand a better chance of achieving them. Help your staff member discover what he or she truly wants. Do not attempt to answer this question as the coach. Keep your questions “forward-focused”: “What do you want?” “What would success look like?”

“An employee’s temptation will be to return to past events, but get them to look to the future.”

“Ask questions that will encourage your employee to curiously examine underlying causes for the issue presented.”

“Questions are the backbone and lifeblood of a coaching dialogue.”

“Many people say that coaching...is more of an art than a science.”

- **“Name possible solutions”** – This is the “problem-solving” phase. Every attitude issue has a range of conceivable cures. Unfortunately, because people are prone to habitual thinking, they often aim for a standardized solution, even if it may not fit. Your job as a coach is to help your employee uncover numerous potential ways to tackle an obstacle, including concepts he or she hasn’t already reviewed. To move ahead, use brainstorming. If you offer tentative fixes, phrase them as qualified ideas – “This probably isn’t it, but you could...” – because your direct report may feel obligated to agree with you. You might ask, “What would President Lincoln tell you to do in this situation?” Or invoke any character you think would be helpful. You can also say, “That’s a great idea, what’s another?” Or ask, “Which of the options gets you closest to what you want?” The employee can grow through thinking about such self-discovery questions.

Do not advance to the next steps until your employee develops “at least three to five good possible solutions.” Then embark on the B.I.G. activities, which “move” the staffer to act:

- **“Build a plan”** – This stage is about taking action, since discovery without deeds is just “introspection.” After the person attains self-awareness, help him or her develop a “SMART” battle plan that is “Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-specific.” At this stage, details are important. You might ask: “What are you going to do?” “What steps do you have to take to get there?” or “When will you do that?” Encourage the staffer to charge along ambitiously. For example, if your employee says he or she will start to solve a problem by having a conversation with a relevant person “next Friday,” you could say, “How about this Friday?”
- **“Ensure action”** – This step centers on “accountability.” Just as discovery has little value without engagement, creating a plan that your staffer doesn’t execute is a waste of time. Hold your employee fully responsible for carrying out the plan. Insist on an “accountability system.” Ask: “How will I know?” “How much time do you need before checking back in with me?” “When will you let me know how it goes?” Coaching’s goal is to get the staffer to shoulder accountability, but be sure you follow up.
- **“Give affirmation”** – “Validate” your employee’s progress. Validation is beneficial throughout the entire coaching process, but it is most critical at the end. Show your staff member that you see and appreciate his or her efforts. You might say, “I just want to...point out how much progress you’ve made.”

Obviously, developing and asking the right questions plays a primary role in coaching. Indeed, some coaching sessions may consist entirely of the coach asking questions. Make your queries simple, direct and open-ended to encourage the employee to give expansive answers. For example, ask, “What things stand in your way?” Use thought-provoking, future-focused questions. Do not phrase questions to offer advice. If you have exhausted your list of worthwhile questions, try: “I’m not sure what [to] ask you next. If you were me, what would you ask?”

“Coaching Mindset”

Being an effective coach requires having the right frame of mind. You must be confident that the staffer can improve with coaching. However, don’t become too attached to or invested in your own ideas or solutions. Let your staff member discover his or her own truth. That is not a discovery anyone can make for someone else, but many hands-on managers find it hard to hold back from becoming their staffer’s Mr. or Ms. Fix-It. To help a person respond positively to coaching, maintain an easy atmosphere. Use creativity

“Developing oneself is challenge enough; determining how to effectively develop others is a massive job that requires many unique skills.”

“Learning how to recognize when and when not to coach is just as important as learning how to coach.”

“If you think you don’t need to be coaching as a manager, think again.”

and humor to make coaching enjoyable. While you are coaching, pay attention to your personal reactions. Heed any “nagging doubt, adrenaline rush or funny feeling.” Cite your instincts to get staffers to examine their gut feelings.

“Coaching Actions”

Coaching dialogue is not repartee. It demands intelligent application of these skills:

- **“Listen”** – To coach people effectively, you cannot plan your responses while they speak. Pay close attention to what the person you are coaching has to say.
- **“Create space”** – Coaching is the ultimate one-on-one exercise. Focus totally on the employee and whatever is on his or her mind. During your sessions, turn off your phone, intercom, email alerts and other sources of distraction or interference.
- **Provide “feedback”** – Make your comments specific. Target the employee’s behavior and how it affects other team members. Explain why acting differently will help.
- **“Celebrate”** – This validates the staff member’s hard work and great gains. Make the celebration something particularly meaningful to that individual.

“Coaching Tricks of the Trade”

Coaches with years of experience have developed techniques for almost any situation, including preventing coaching discussions from getting detoured. While you can’t hurry a coaching dialogue, you also can’t let a conversation deteriorate into a wordy mishmash that inadvertently conceals more than it reveals. Keep the discussion focused by guiding it along. For example, you might suggest, “In two or three sentences, explain the issue to me.” If the staffer needs to discuss a conflict, listen to the problem but don’t get sidetracked into talking about the other party. Choose your words carefully. Avoid “everybody,” “always,” “never” and “can’t.” People do not respond well to being told what they should or shouldn’t do; they need to reach their own conclusions.

An employee’s version of events is just one perspective. Help individuals see that other legitimate viewpoints exist. Your staffer may need to adopt a different perspective to overcome his or her attitudinal obstacles. In fact, sometimes people who need coaching don’t want it. In that case, focus on the resistance, not on the session’s outcome, so you can help the person smash through his or her reluctance. This will not be easy on you. When someone says coaching is wasting his or her time, ask something like, “What would have to happen for it to be a better use of your time?”

Every coaching process is different. Spend as much time as you need on each phase. Don’t expect the progression to remain linear all the time. If you need to return to the discovery phase at some later point in the process, do so. Remember that the employee must attain awareness before developing an action plan. Expect that your sessions will sometimes become emotional. If the staffer feels upset, don’t try to “fix” his or her feelings; you cannot. So, how will you know if coaching is working? The proof of coaching is in the pudding: You will see your employees notably change for the better. Be proud that you could help them grow.

About the Authors

Anne Loehr and **Brian Emerson** are certified executive coaches with broad international experience. They co-founded the Safaris for the Soul leadership retreats. Emerson also heads Riverstone Endeavors, an organizational development firm.