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Developing a coaching culture

Coaching can help boost performance, but you must establish a culture that embraces coaching to see the benefits.

BY DR ANNETTE CLANCY

One of the most important attributes of a successful leader is their ability and willingness to develop others. Because of this, business leaders are now recognising the value and importance of coaching. If you look at job listings, you regularly see 'the ability to coach and develop others' on the list of skills needed in managers and leaders.

Businesses are now going one step further and investing in 'coaching cultures'. Coaching cultures are about delivering results and developmental opportunities to help people grow. You have a coaching culture when leadership is clear that coaching is at the heart of how the organisation is run.

What is coaching?

Unlike giving advice or direction to staff, coaching is an ongoing developmental process. Its purpose is to help your coachee to continue to learn and develop after the coaching session is completed.

Coach and coachee agree on a development plan and work towards its execution together. The development plan is always created in the context of the organisation's strategy. This distinguishes coaching from more personal approaches, like life coaching. The coach's role is to ask questions, not give direction, and to assist the coachee in making their own decisions to keep them accountable. The coach is not the expert; the coach is a guide. Done

well, coaching can have a big impact on performance and productivity.

Creating a coaching culture

Lead from the top

It's important to make a coaching project visible to all staff to show that coaching is at the centre of the organisation; that it is a permanent fixture and not a once-off project. Get an organisation leader to be a coach and a coachee, sending a clear message that coaching is at the heart of the organisation. Without a champion at a senior level, it is unlikely that a coaching culture will become embedded.

Establish a coaching programme for senior management

Encourage senior managers to see the benefit of coaching for themselves. They will bring their experience and enthusiasm for coaching to their own staff. Establish a company-wide coaching training programme. Customise the programme as managers become coaches themselves within the company. Once established, you can customise the programme for the context of your company and culture.

Align coaching culture with the organisational performance

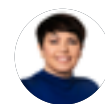
Coaching is not an end in and of itself. Coaching is always in the service of team and organisational performance. Coaching should be undertaken with the organisational and business

strategy in focus and so, it is important that coaching and organisational goals are always aligned. It is also important that the boundaries between coach and coachee are explicitly negotiated and an agreement about confidentiality and reporting structures is drawn up.

Hold yourself accountable at an organisational level

Follow-through in a coaching culture is as important at an organisational level as it is on an individual level. Leaders at the top should look for feedback from coaches and coachees, and listen to what people say about the coaching process. If the coaching programme isn't working, then review, revise and renew.

Finally, you don't need to work in a large organisation to enjoy a coaching culture. Some of the best examples of coaching cultures I have seen have come from small companies and individual practitioners. For example, a group of self-employed and solo entrepreneurs can gather monthly to coach each other. Reach out into your network to look for other professionals who want to engage in a coaching programme. Coaching keeps each person accountable and aligned with business goals as you plan the next stages of business growth.



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