

Headline promotes best management practice within organisations by adopting a coaching philosophy and methodology

Introduction

Businesses are today working within rapidly changing circumstances which make considerable demands on the staff and their managers; new skills are needed and staff are likely to feel less confident in their work as a result. Increasingly the individual has the responsibility for career and self development but also recognising that employers and managers have a role to play in supporting development activities.

One consequence of this responsibility is a new role for the manager- from controller to coach, i.e. someone who motivates people to achieve by believing in them and helping them to tackle new areas of work. Effective coaching is an integral part of any managers techniques, but is becoming more important as demands on managers increase.

When acting as coach, the manager relies on his or her relationship with individual team members. The relationship is a delicate one, as a manager who has not won the respect and loyalty of the staff will not be an effective coach.

The success of any training or coaching relies heavily, therefore, on the general attitude of individuals towards their manager which will be determined by success in all areas of the job. A good manager, who is perceived by the team as being informed, experienced and approachable has the potential to be a good coach.

Attributes

It would be difficult to define exactly what makes a good manager, but there are several attributes of good management which are irrefutable. They

foster the right environment for people to motivate themselves, are effective communicators, good at self-analysis and quick to react.

Taken as a whole, these qualities seem to be a lot to ask of any individual, especially if they are to be maintained hour after hour, day after day. Yet managers must excel in their performance and exhibit these qualities if they are to be taken seriously in their coaching role.

Rather than casually discussing coaching as a "bit of training" - or associating it merely with the communication of technical skills- an effective manager will regard coaching as an integral part of whatever he or she is doing. This approach recognises the existence of a range of interpersonal in addition to technical skills- those related to communication, presentation and the most effective ways of dealing with various situations in the workplace. An effective manager recognises these skills and realises that all of his or her team members are entitled to be concerned about their own development and training. If team members feel valued-that they are worth spending time, trouble and resources on- then it naturally follows that their motivation will be increased and that productivity will, in turn, also be increased.

Perspectives

Recognising the importance and value of every individual in the team or department is a key factor in successful coaching. Dictionaries give one definition of the word coach as: "a vehicle used to transport important people over long distances". This definition gives a very important perspective on the role of the manager as a coach.

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He or she is taking an important, valued individual- the employee- from one place to another, even from a level of good performance to a level of exceptional performance.

This concept is quite a difficult one for many people to come to terms with, largely because coaching is one of the few management skills which have been sought in the last five years to ten years. Prior to this time, our indigenous industries required large numbers of unskilled workers to carry out fairly mundane and repetitive tasks, necessitating managers to perform a "command and control" function. It is only with the development of modern industries- which require highly trained employees with a range of skills to perform the tasks that they require intelligence and initiative- that managers in the UK have had to take on the multi-function role that they now perform.

Some experts in the field of management argue that coaching skills are not just part of the range of tools that a manager must have at his or her disposal, but are central to, and more important than, all other management skills.

Research

Roger Evered, professor of management at the Naval Postgraduate School of Monterey, California, USA, and James Selman, a specialist consultant in productivity improvement and organisational development, argue that the key to being an effective manager is to abandon the notion that "managing equals controlling" and adhere instead to the tenet, "managing equals creating a context for coaching"

Management as an art implies inventiveness rather than mere conformity

In their research article, "Coaching and the Art of Management", Evered and Selman state that: "Effective management remains essentially an art- the art of getting things done through people". Thinking of management as an art- rather than a set of techniques- is potentially more fruitful because it recognises management as more than a set of explicit techniques.

"Management as art implies inventiveness rather than mere conformity, practice rather than mere prescription, wisdom rather than mere knowledge". Evered and Selman believe that, when a manager's role is brought into focus, his or her

effectiveness can be observed through noting the following five points

1. Observing a truly effective manager in action is much like watching an artist at work.
2. Managers who attend to what is actually going on out perform those who try to apply remembered techniques, canned prescriptions and rational models.
3. Work results spring from the quality of the communication- speaking and listening- between managers and their people.
4. The effectiveness of management flows from the level of partnership that is created between managers and the people with whom, through whom, and by whom the job gets done and the results are generated.
5. Effective managers are skilful in generating an empowering organisational climate.

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Following Evered and Selman's argument, it can be seen that a manager can ensure the completion of tasks by his or her individual staff by being sensitive to the climate, environment and context in which the work gets done.

Coaching can be defined as the managerial activity of creating, by communication only, the climate, environment, and context that empowers individuals and teams to generate results.

To accept this definition is to accept the conditions and needs of our modern industries in terms of their management demands. It is an acceptance that acknowledges that "command and control" styles of management have become obsolete, and that the one most important role for the manager is to enable individual team members to generate

results, and to be empowered by the results they generate. Evered and Selman define the style of management that adheres to this acceptance as, simply, coaching. What is involved in this shift from traditional concerns with hierarchical authority, order and control, and motivation by job insecurity, to one that is based on partnership for achieving results and commitment through collaboration to accomplish new possibilities rather than old structures.

Coaching Roles

It becomes easier to accept the paramount importance of coaching after an examination of the general role of the coach in our society. It would certainly be difficult to refute the assertions that:

individuals and teams generally perform better with a coach; that superior individual and team performances in any environment- notably in sports, for example- lead to greater success; and that the quality of coaching makes a big difference to the results produced.

In modern management, coaching does not have quite the same nature as it does in sports or education, but its influences make themselves felt in the same way. For the modern manager, his or her role

as coach is an ongoing, committed partnership with an individual employee or team which empowers that individual or team to exceed prior levels of performance.

But how can we define coaching within the work environment? Coaching is a comprehensive and distinctive way of being related to others within an organisation and, if it becomes an integral part of the managerial structure, can provide managers with a way of developing themselves and others in the "art" of management.

In many organisations, coaching is missing as a management style. As a result, little or no attention is given to developing the skills and qualities of effective coaching in various management programmes.

Process

Coaching must be a two-way process, and produces results solely through communication. It is driven by the commitment both of the coach and



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the employee, but unlike other types of supportive relationships, it also calls for a high degree of interpersonal risk and trust on behalf of both parties.

Coaching also calls for rethinking and transforming our traditional models of management organisation, work and society. Management has evolved in a hierarchical model of organisation. Coaching requires a more dynamic vision based more on relationship, commitment, purpose and results, rather than, prescribed order and authority. The beneficial effects of coaching derive almost solely from the nature of the coaching- employee relationship and the communication which occurs in that relationship.

The coach's job is not primarily to give information but to enable or empower the player to go beyond the current level of performance. A coach is centrally concerned with the way the employee sees and interprets.

One of the basic principles of effective coaching is that no one can be coached in the absence of a demand for it. However, unless the circumstances and individual personalities involved are extremely unfavourable, an effective manager should be able to stimulate an individual's interest in training.

The benefits of coaching to most people are both evident and attractive- providing opportunities to increase personal knowledge, understand a job more fully, take on more responsibility and make more decisions which affect the individual's own role at work.

However, even if a manager fully embraces the coaching principle, without an existing organisation culture supporting this philosophy, he or she is unlikely to succeed. Organisations have to be re-educated so that coaching is not viewed as a challenge to our customary ways of thinking about management or solely as a way of dealing with poor performers. There needs to be a paradigm shift.

So what can management do to bring about the change in culture? Evered and Selman argue that the following eight points have proved to be successful:

1. Examine what factors currently limit action within the organisation and explore the possibility of creating a new organisational way of behaving.
2. Commit to undertake a specific project in which

effective coaching skills will be developed and practiced.

3. Determine who will be involved and who will benefit.
4. Declare who will be the coach in each relationship and what the person being coached is being committed to achieve.
5. Be prepared for problems as the project progresses- a natural consequence of commitment in a coaching relationship, is that the coaching uncovers barriers to the next level of performance.
6. The coach should look for new actions and ideas- an effective coach listens for commitment.
7. Acknowledge accomplishments and opportunities to reinforce the original commitment to the project.
8. At the conclusion of the project, or at the interim phases, be truthful about whether you have accomplished what you intended.

Conclusion

As suggested above, coaching can only be successful if the organisation is receptive to, and encourages, this approach. Developing trust and empowering staff can only happen in an organisation that values people and the contribution they make, so that for many businesses, a shift in culture is important.

Similarly, not all managers have the appropriate interpersonal and listening skills to be good coaches, therefore training in these areas is necessary. Finally, confidence and responsibility do not appear overnight and therefore continuing support and encouragement will be vital to help staff to believe in themselves.

Coaching is not a new concept and should not be seen as another new answer for managing, but rather as a reminder of what really counts in management, organisation and work. It does, however, offer something radically new for management- a revision of our thinking about human organisation and a fresh approach to breakthroughs in performance in areas that have become stagnant or unproductive. Coaching enables people to shift their thinking from controlling to acknowledging and empowering people in action. It creates a new context for management, one that fosters a genuine partnership between managers and employees.