

**There's a lot of talk about coaching these days, but Forrest Cottrell says most executives are still not using it to good advantage.**

# Coaching 101

**T**he term coaching has become a common, almost clichéd term of late. Yet it's still not a process most people fully understand.

Ask any athlete what a coach does, and they can explain it to you in perfect detail; they have experienced what it is like to be coached on a regular basis. Ask the average sales person, or an employee in any department, if they are receiving coaching or if their manager is a good coach. They will usually tell you no or ask you to define coach. They ask because they have never been coached.

Similarly, if you ask most managers to define leadership, intellectually they can provide you with an answer. Many managers go through some sort of leadership training during which they're exposed to the concept of developing their people as a prime responsibility. But while many managers know intellectually that coaching is part of leadership, they don't instinctively know how to coach. Why is that?

Most managers get promoted because they have done well at their entry-level responsibilities. After they're promoted, they are excited about their new opportunity, but many don't know how they should act. They're told to tell others to do what they used to do so well and that if they work as hard as you did, they will excel also.

But if it were that easy, all great athletes would also be great coaches. Clearly, it's not that simple. To be an effective coach, they must have had a role model who taught them to value people by showing them respect and giving them the opportunity to grow at a rate that they are capable of, stretching their horizons along the way.

Most managers are trained to critique performance to find areas needing improvement. They're not trained to provide encouragement and sincere affirmation. Some advocate accentuating the positive and minimizing the negative. But how do you find strengths in a new employee that's a slow starter?

The answer is recognizing that different people learn differently and that many people have past experiences that hold them back from future performance. Have you ever hired someone who

had tremendous potential and never fulfilled it? They were smart the day you hired them—did they then take a stupid pill?

Many managers manage activities without looking at the individual in a holistic way, taking into consideration their life on and off the job. When results don't come quickly, it's simply a bad hire, and turnover results.

It's no different from a high school or college coach who must realize that the athletes' education and what they do in the classroom is as important as what they do on the field or court. Performance at work is often a reflection of how well things are going at home.

Studies have shown that most job performance problems are due to difficulties at home. An employee might have a sick child or spouse, or there might be a death in the family. Perhaps the employee is going through a difficult marriage or has suffered from abusive parents. Many people have a self-image based on things they believe about themselves that are, in fact, untrue.

### **New paradigm**

As an assistant coach for a high school football team, I had a student who was 6'4" and weighed 240 pounds but was never eligible to play varsity football. He had all the potential, but we could not get him on the field because we couldn't get him to the necessary 2.0 grade point average. His GPA was 1.9, a seemingly small gap. It turns out the student thought he was not smart enough to get a 2.0 GPA because he had

**M**any managers manage activi-

ties without looking at the individual in a holistic way.

When results don't come quickly, it's simply a bad

hire, and turnover results.



**The next time you meet an underperforming employee, start by changing your attitude. If you convince them that you believe in them, you may get them to trust you enough to start listening to you as a coach.**



been held back in fifth grade. He thought his teacher believed he was stupid. He thought his friends thought he was stupid because he was left behind. To be eligible would be smart, and smart was defined as a 2.0 GPA—in his mind, he could never achieve that.

We got him some tutoring and helped him develop new study habits during summer school by meeting for an hour every day with friends who had good grades. He became eligible by the fourth game of the season and went on to become an all-conference player.

He then set a goal to become a state champion in wrestling at the 275-pound (heavyweight) class. Keep in mind that he'd never wrestled because he was never eligible. We gave him extra one-on-one coaching. He not only won the state championship, he did so by pinning last year's champion, who outweighed him by 35 pounds, in 57 seconds. He went on to be all-state in football his senior year and repeated as state wrestling champion, pinning his last 11 opponents.

With this renewed self-confidence, he decided he wanted to play college football on scholarship. He needed a combined SAT test score of at least 1,000 to be eligible. With a little coaching, some tutoring, and his new study habits, he scored 1,360 out of a possible 1,600 and received a full-ride scholarship to a Division One college. He was not stupid, but he had a self-inflicted paradigm that was based on a lie he had created about himself.

### **Reducing turnover**

Does this apply in business as well? It does if you have an employee who's not performing to their potential. Perhaps you have a salesperson who has plateaued after years of excellent success. A plateau doesn't necessarily mean the individual is no longer committed or unmotivated. There may be a barrier in their life that if you take the time to discover, you might be able to remove. More importantly, you may be able to help them self-discover that barrier, providing motivation that's not dependent on you being there to prod them.

Leadership is not about herding people to the destination you chose for them, using a stick in one hand and a carrot in the other. Leadership includes coaching people to higher levels. As an example, I worked with a manager who had an



employee that was always rated highly but never the top person, so we could not promote him. Over time, the manager wanted to cut him loose to make room for someone else who could be promoted.

After a coaching session, she discovered the individual did not want to be promoted because it would mean relocating. She found a team-manager position that allowed for short distance travel by car to manage the region. He went on to be the top-rated team manager in the region.

This situation could have created turnover, with the resulting recruitment and development of a new person. Instead, the manager saved the employee and promoted him. Surveys have shown that employees don't leave companies—they leave managers. Better coaching reduces turnover because successful people feel better about their jobs.

Do you have employees with a negative self-perception that has not allowed them to be as successful as your expectations? To be a great leader and great coach, you need to see more in that person than they see in themselves. The next time you meet an underperforming employee, start by changing your attitude. If you convince them that you believe in them, you may get them to trust you enough to start listening to you as a coach. Value them, encourage them, and affirm them, and they will one day exceed your expectations.



*Forrest Cottrell is president of DVelop, Inc. a training organization that develops people to develop businesses. He has hired over 1,500 people and trained over 10,000 sales employees and over 1,200 managers and executives. He can be reached at (602) 296-7366 or [forrest@dvelop.biz](mailto:forrest@dvelop.biz).*