

Don't be *that* boss! Be *that* coach!



Coaching to drive performance is a hot topic and with good reason: Coaching consistently helps drive stronger results. What's more, employees with great coaches usually outperform their peers, they're more engaged on the job, and they expend more discretionary effort to get the job done. But how can you shift from being a *that* boss to becoming that coach?



It's common to characterize coaching with a sports metaphor: Coaches get the team to perform better and to win more. But it's perhaps better to look back about 100 years ago when coaching wasn't about sports at all. A coach back then was a horse-drawn carriage that took very important people from where they are, to where they want to be.

It's a good way to describe what coaches can do for their employees. But organizations often struggle to implement coaching effectively and more consistently. For most people, developing a

coaching mindset involves some important pivots, including:

Ask. Don't tell

The key to coaching is not in the telling. It's in the asking. At the heart of the issue is an inherent challenge: Some leaders have the mindset that coaching is catching mistakes and solving problems rather than developing confidence, instilling a sense of ownership and maximizing employee potential.

Create problem solvers

Managers typically need to have the answers and provide direction. But coaches excel at helping people develop the confidence to answer their own questions and find their own solutions. Get in the habit of helping people ask and answer the questions. People feel good when they solve problems – they're empowered. And it develops our bench strength around us.

People's confidence is directly related to their ability to solve problems. What's more, people are more valuable – and more promotable – when they develop muscle mass around solving problems.

Aim to be a buffalo, not a cow

In his book, *Take the Stairs: 7 Steps for Achieving True Success* Rory Vaden tells the story of growing up in the Rockies where storms could blow in from one mountain to the next. Ranchers know that cows run away from the storms and, since they're slow and

plodding, they prolong their time in the storm because it's following them. The buffalo, on the other hand, turns toward the storm and charges into it. In confronting it, the buffalo gets over the storm more quickly.

As leaders, we prolong pain when we don't address important issues. We make problems worse when we don't develop our people's ability to address them.

One device my colleague Mike Fisher used a number of years ago in developing a young sales team was to create what he called "The Wheel of Misfortune." It had every issue or barrier or challenge that Mike knew of, and his team would add to it regularly. He would gather everyone around, and they'd spin the wheel — which would land on one of the issues or problems — and whoever's turn it was would address it by articulating their solution and addressing it head on. The Wheel of Misfortune taught a relatively inexperienced sales team to focus on the solution and to not shy away from addressing any issue that comes up.

Watch for coaching myths

The biggest misconception about coaching is this: The best players make the best coaches. Some do, of course, but you have to give them the tools and help them build the muscle around helping people develop.

Attitude is critical too — it's the multiplier of a coach's success. It makes a huge difference if someone is really committed to helping someone vs. going through the motions.

Try this quick coaching framework

Here's a simple process for coaches to have highly effective one-on-ones with your team: Ask. Listen. Coach. Praise. Challenge.

Let's unpack them briefly:

Ask questions to understand what the situation is, what's going on, where they're succeeding and where they're struggling.

Listen for their specific solutions and ideas. And by listen, I mean *really listen* vs. listening for the chance to speak up and offer direction.

Coach when necessary by sharing a few ideas that have worked for others and might work for them. But make sure to give them the space to solve the problem themselves.

Praise in a way that's specific, measurable and timely. It's not enough to say "good job" — which is more likely overly general and lacks precision. It's far better — and more empowering — to praise something specifically and acknowledge a solution or performance in a detailed way. What gets praised is often duplicated.

Challenge them to get out of their comfort zones by showing that you see more in them than they see in themselves. But challenging also involves stepping back a bit and exploring with them how they'd like to be held accountable to a specific challenge. A great question to wrap up the challenge portion of the discussion: *How would you like me to hold you accountable to this goal?*

Above all, remember that coaching one-on-ones are about goal-setting, not performance evaluation. This is about where they're going, not about where they've been, which is a different conversation. Have them tell you their goals vs. you defining them. When people identify their goals, they believe in them and take ownership. ■

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