

Don't confuse coaching with feedback

by Renée Robertson



I have learned that coaching means many things to many people. I often see a certain technique in practice that is referred to as “coaching” among managers, when really all that is happening in these instances is that counseling or feedback is being supplied.

For example, on several occasions I have heard a manager say, “Let me give you some coaching around ABC,” and he proceeds to explain to an employee why the employee failed to accomplish a task.

The manager then explains the way ABC needs to be done and sometimes will provide an example of how ABC has been accomplished in the past.

More times than not, I have seen the recipient of this so-called “coaching” walk away disillusioned by what he thinks was a coaching experience. As a result, coaching can get a bad rap and be misunderstood.

Put me in, coach

So what does a real coaching conversation look like? Well, something more like this: “So, how do you think your presentation on ABC went?”

The employee is given time to reflect, respond and be an active participant in the conversation.

The manager continues to ask thoughtful questions of the employee and gives him ample time to respond. Such questions may include:

- What do you think went well and/or not so well?
- What would you have done differently?
- How can you prepare better for next time?
- What steps will you take between now and then to do so?
- How would you like to be held accountable for your actions?
- What can I do to support you?

Do you notice the difference? This is a true coaching conversation!

The employee is empowered to act, and with the support of his manager he gains clarity regarding the situation and comes up with an action plan to resolve it.

The employee gains confidence knowing that there’s a viable solution that can be carried out, and he feels acknowledged and supported by his manager.

Taking the shortcut

Unfortunately though, in some corporate cultures, you would be hard-pressed to find these types of coaching conversations.

Some managers believe it's faster to get something done by telling employees what to do rather than having them work out solutions themselves.

This may especially be true if an employee is new to his or her role or to the company or has never done a certain task before.

However, if this behavior is endemic and repeated, both the employees and the company can suffer in the long run.

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