

Managing is “Out”, Coaching is “In”

Are you a supervisor who is being asked to do more with less? Do your employees face similar pressures? Do you have precious few resources to accomplish your team or departmental goals in a timely way while juggling a tsunami of incoming information? If so, you may doubt the wisdom in the statement that you can accomplish more and inspire your team to do the same by slowing down and by using your energies in a more focused way.

Beware the Busy Manager!

After observing scores of managers for many years, researchers at the Harvard Business Review came to this exact conclusion. They found that the most accomplished managers possess two key traits. These traits are not how quickly they work, how effectively they multi task, or how smart they are compared to others in the room. The most effective managers possess high energy and the power to effectively focus that energy. The best supervisors put these same skills into practice when connecting with and motivating their team members.

The Case for Coaching

A leader with an authoritarian style who dictates what to do, decides what goals are most important, and controls all work activity without including employees in a meaningful way, may appear to get things done quicker and easier, yet this approach leaves little room for employee growth and buy-in. In contrast, regular communication related to employee development—also known as “coaching conversations”—creates a foundation for worker engagement. Coaching requires energy and focus over time. For some managers, it also requires commitment to a new approach to leading people. The good news is that coaching is a skill that can be learned and may prove as rewarding for the manager as it is for the employees being coached.

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Employers often ask leadership trainers how to motivate employees. While there is no easy or one-size-fits-all answer, coaching and motivating employees go hand in hand. Why is this? Most leaders in organizations have limited “extrinsic rewards” to motivate or engage employees, including incentives such as higher pay and more perks. At the same time, most of us are more motivated by “intrinsic rewards” than we are by a pay raise or even a promotion. That is why developing and coaching employees is so vital.

Toward a “Coach Approach”

The first step to effectively coach and motivate employees is to take the time to understand their needs. This is sometimes referred to as the “Ask, don’t tell” skill. When you have a number of goals and deadlines to meet, it can be tempting to use your expertise to jump in with the answers, and sometimes that is what is needed. Coaching, however, is more of a conversation.

“Open-ended questions, not answers, are the tools of coaching. You succeed as a coach by helping your team members articulate their goals and challenges and find their own answers.” (Valcour, 2014)

Listening intently to employees will give them the opportunity to come up with ways of meeting goals that they feel excited about and believe they can truly put into action.

Put me in, Coach!

In addition to actively listening to their employees, managers must support and follow up with them on their professional development goals. As with plans established during annual performance reviews, goals will motivate employees more if they are reviewed often and tweaked as needed when circumstances warrant. This also gives the employee or manager opportunities to identify what is needed to support the employee’s progress toward their goals. Employees should take an active role in identifying what resources they need and how they plan to meet their goals. These challenges can stimulate employees to come up with their own solutions

and help them take greater responsibility for their success and gain a deeper connection to their own development.

Now What?

Remember, coaching requires energy and focus over time. There are several articles, guides and checklists to help promote effective coaching on the job. Because it is a skill, managers will likely develop their own preferred style over time. The key to getting started is to create the time for coaching to happen. If you are accustomed to a more directive approach to managing, trusting the process may take some getting used to. Just remember to remain curious and open-minded, listen intently, and encourage employees to take ownership of their developmental plans. Coaching is an investment that will pay off over time.

Coaching Tips

Dedicate regular time for coaching to take place.

Listen.

The goal is to “Ask, don’t tell”.

Support employees toward their goals.

Energy + Focus + Time = engaged employees!

Resources: <https://hbr.org/2002/02/beware-the-busy-manager>
One More Time: How do you Motivate Employees?
Frederick Herzberg

References: Valcour, Monique “You Can’t be a Great manager if You’re not a Good Coach”,
Harvard Business Review, July 17,2014