

# Solutions

FAMILY SERVICES  EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

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NEWSLETTER

Issue 46

## *Coaching in the workplace* *Learning to lead effectively*

Whether you're a new manager who's feeling overwhelmed or an experienced employee who wants to become an effective team leader, a coach may be able to help you reach your goal. Just as a baseball coach motivates players to perform better on the field, a workplace coach works one-on-one with you to help identify old behaviours that aren't effective and push you to improve your job performance and working relationships.

Essentially, coaching is about one person helping another to excel. It is an equal partnership, where the person being coached sets the agenda, and the coach helps them find the best way to reach their goals. Coaching isn't about giving advice or telling someone what to do. A good coach will present more questions than answers, and challenge the person being coached to consider new perspectives and different approaches when dealing with problems at work. Your coach is a facilitator, who will help you discover your own path to success.

### **Who needs a coach?**

Coaching is especially useful to supervisors and managers, but it can be an effective tool for anyone who wants to build their leadership skills.

You may need a coach if:

- You feel your employees are taking advantage of you.
- Your work is not up to company standards.
- You find it difficult to discipline employees or be firm when required.
- Work isn't getting done on time.
- You have just received a promotion and need help adjusting to your new role.
- You have trouble communicating with your staff.
- You or your employees lack enthusiasm.
- You want to build your abilities and move ahead in your career.

### **Benefits of coaching**

For an organization to be healthy and productive, it must have strong leadership. Your coach will help you become more effective in your position, build stronger workplace relationships, and promote a more positive work environment.

More and more, businesses that want to boost productivity and improve staff morale are using coaching to develop their employees' abilities to lead and work together as a team.

While coaching may be brought into a workplace to address one person's specific gaps in skill or experience, the benefits go far beyond learning a new technique. Coaching leads to greater team harmony and better overall job performance. It increases employees' self-esteem and confidence, and leaves them feeling motivated and committed to doing their best.

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# Workplace coaching (continued)

## How it works

Coaching is about more than just learning a new skill. It is a lesson in self-discovery and self-improvement. More than just identifying the problem—for example, you are not being firm enough with employees—a coach will help you identify the underlying assumptions and beliefs that cause you to act or react in specific way to different challenges at work.

At the beginning, your coach will use questionnaires, feedback from co-workers, role-play exercises and direct observation in your work environment to assess your leadership style.

Later, during private one-on-one sessions, your coach may also ask you to answer some hard—even uncomfortable—questions designed to increase your self-awareness and lead you toward new insights about your own behaviour. Once you understand your own approach to work pressures and relationships, your coach will help you find new ways to look at these old problems and to strengthen the areas where you feel you are weak.

Obviously, the coaching relationship involves a large amount of trust and respect. The person being coached must feel comfortable enough to talk about all aspects of their work life: obstacles and achievements, strengths and weaknesses, failures and success. And the coach must be able to ask tough questions and get honest answers in order to be effective.

## Coach or mentor?

While the two activities are often confused, coaching and mentoring are very different tools with very different goals.

Mentors are usually matched up with younger or less experienced employees. They allow them to observe their behaviour, offer advice, answer questions, and provide guidance and wisdom based on their experiences and accomplishments. The goal in mentoring is to help someone do what the mentor does.

A coach, on the other hand, is interested in helping you do your present job more effectively. A coach

doesn't tell you how to do things. Instead, he or she will help you set your own goals, and encourage you to find your own answers.

## Managers as coaches

Today many managers are being encouraged to “coach” their employees. And while good communication and strong leadership skills are essential to an organization's success, it is important to recognize, and try to avoid, the pitfalls that appear when managers act as coaches.

First, many people feel uncomfortable opening up to their boss, and describing their true feelings about work. They may be too worried about getting into trouble, or offending their manager, to say what they are really thinking. As a result, manager will have to work hard to build trust and be effective coaches.

Second, managers may find it difficult to switch from coach to manager and back. One minute they are focused solely on the employee's development, and the next they must push that same employee to put aside their feelings and meet an important deadline. This situation has the potential to undermine the manager's authority and to damage the coaching process, especially if the manager ends up having to discipline the employee.

## Learn more about coaching

The best way to learn about coaching is to get one! If you want to improve your leadership and communication skills at work, call your EAP counselor and talk about the possibility of having a workplace coach.

If you are not ready to jump in with both feet, do some more reading on the topic, or go online and check out these resources:

- *Mentoring and Coaching in the Workplace*  
<http://www.acerra.ca/english/news/horizons/2004-11-01.htm>
- *Coaching Connection*  
<http://coaching.gc.ca>
- *International Coach Federation*  
<http://www.coachfederation.org>

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP, call:

**1-800-668-9920**