

# Managers Who Coach: An Alternate Approach That Really Works

**Let's get something straight: managing employees and coaching employees are not the same. There is overlap between the two, but they have different objectives.**

A manager's main goal is to ensure an employee can do - and is effectively doing - their job. A coach, on the other hand, is focused on helping the employee develop a range of skills that will help grow, evolve, and meet new challenges throughout their career.

Still, many business leaders assume a great manager can also act as a great coach. Yet since a 2016 study from the International Coaching Federation found that 57 percent of managers lack formal coaching credentials, chances are they're not fully prepared to take on that responsibility.

If you also want your managers to coach their employees, offer them the leadership coaching and development programmes and support they'll need to succeed.

But first, let's take a look at what obstacles managers will need to overcome as coaches.

## Challenges Managers Face As Coaches

### Balancing Responsibilities

Whenever an employee faces a problem and needs some guidance, there are two ways for their boss to help them out: either as a manager or as a coach. It's not always clear which is the best option for the situation at hand. Since most managers are more familiar with the managing role, they tend to overlook coaching opportunities.

In fact, a 2016 Blessing White study found that 41 percent of managers feel they don't spend the right amount of time coaching. This leads to an unbalanced and ineffective experience for the employee.

Here are a few ways a manager can seize more opportunities to offer coaching:

- Develop interpersonal skills: Improving an employee's communication and teamwork skills can not only help them in their current role, but also throughout their career
- Focus on the positive when giving feedback: Instead of concentrating on mistakes or weaknesses, take time to provide advice on how employees can continue to improve their strengths
- Help with their personal career goals: Discuss their individual goals and give them the resources and opportunities to reach them.

## Maintaining Boundaries

There's a difference between a manager/employee relationship and one between a coach and an employee. The former is based on a hierarchy with an inherent power discrepancy; the manager gives directions, and the employee follows them.

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In a coaching relationship, there's more equality. Both parties work together toward the employee's development. It requires more trust. Given that, walking the line between boss and coach can be difficult, especially since a 2017 Officevibe survey found 37 percent of employees don't feel close to their manager.

The trick to creating a relationship in which the manager is both trusted and retains their authority is to establish boundaries. This starts with a conversation about what falls under coaching confidentiality.

For instance, an employee's goals and worries about their development should be kept private. There's no need to discuss what roles they aspire to with anyone else in the company. Their performance in their current role, however, falls under the manager realm. Making this distinction early on gives the manager and employee a sense of security with both sides of the relationship.

## Seeing Progress

Most organisations have clear criteria to assess an employee's performance, which makes it easy to track and see the progress they've accomplished.

Coaching, on the other hand, involves developing skills that are harder to quantify. Not being able to point to something concrete, like increased sales or fewer customer complaints, can make managers feel discouraged as coaches.

One way to avoid this is to have each employee complete a 360 assessment. A 360 will provide a skill baseline and help identify the other skills a person should develop. It will reveal what areas the coaching should focus on and, when the coaching process concludes after a few months, the employee and manager can identify improvements.

Another important coaching tactic is to provide more in-the-moment feedback. Instead of waiting for a formal meeting to discuss how things are going, a manager can see daily behaviours, switch gears to coaching mode, and give feedback. They can then immediately see how the employee changes.

## How To Set Them Up For Success

Now that you understand the challenges managers will face when they also coach employees, it's time to learn the best way to lay the groundwork for success. If you give your managers the right tools and support, they'll be effective in both roles.

## Offer Them Coaching, As Well

Providing managers with leadership coaching gives them the experience and insight of effective coaching and provides them with the foundation for how they should coach others. They experience firsthand what

types of coaching efforts work and which ones don't.

In fact, the aforementioned BlessingWhite survey found that when managers themselves are coached by their superiors, 65 percent have a better idea of how much time to spend on coaching with their own subordinates.

If providing leadership coaching to managers who are expected to coach is not available, there are other options. Consider providing managers with coaching through:

- **Peer Coaching:** Have managers with complementary strengths and weaknesses coach each other
- **Coaching Partnerships:** Pair up with another organisation that wants to offer coaching to its managers and team up. The combined resources and leadership will ensure everyone gets the attention they need
- **Group Coaching:** While perhaps not as effective as one-on-one coaching, one coach working with a group of two or three managers can provide a coaching experience that also will serve as a shared learning forum on how to best coach direct reports.

## Remind Them It's About The Employee

Chances are your organisation has its own preferred way to get day-to-day business accomplished. It's a manager's job to make sure everyone is playing their part in that process. Their responsibility is to the company.

A coach's responsibility, however, is to their coachee. That means it's more important for them to focus on how the employee needs to go about their development than how the manager or the organisation would. Sometimes that means giving the coachee space to make their own mistakes and learn, which can be very difficult for a manager to do.

When managers have their coaching hat on, remind them to:

- **Allow the coachee to try things out their way:** This will let them play to their natural strengths and, more importantly, develop less used skills
- **Let mistakes happen:** Even if you see an issue that the coachee doesn't, give them the chance to identify and respond to it themselves
- **Be patient:** Learning new behaviours takes time and practice
- **Provide balanced feedback:** Coaching is about building upon current abilities and developing new ones. Constructive feedback needs to be mixed with encouragement to be successful
- **Be open to different methods:** Coaching entails employees discovering what processes help them succeed professionally. What works for one person might not be what works for them.

## Follow Up With Training

Acting as a coach for employees is a big change for many managers. It requires them to learn new skills and change their behaviours. It takes time for those new coaching habits to form. By offering follow-up training, managers can be reminded of what they should be doing or what they forgot.

In fact, follow-up training is so important, it can make the difference between long-term success and failure. A 2016 Grovo report found that 80 percent of managers who change their behaviours temporarily after training go back to their old ways in less than six months.

Reinforce new behaviours by offering regular check-ins with managers, as well as refresher courses. During these sessions, ask individual managers what they're struggling with so they can revisit relevant skills. Through feedback and continuous practice with coaching skills, they'll eventually become second-nature for managers.

Also, remember to ask the employees being coached for their feedback on how the manager is doing. This will provide a better perspective of what needs to be addressed further in the coach's follow-up training. After all, if the employee doesn't feel their coaching is working, it serves little purpose.

But make sure employees know their feedback will be kept private and they don't need to worry about anything negative getting back to their manager.

## Reassess Frequently

There's always room for improvement. By regularly taking a look at your coaching programme you can see opportunities to make it better. As part of managers' coaching, provide them with useful feedback.

Use the anonymous feedback you received from their employees as well as your own observations to give them suggestions. But don't forget to applaud them for what they're doing right. That will reinforce the behaviour and make it more habitual for the manager.

Also consider external factors that might be impacting their success as a coach. Here are some questions to ask and guide how you adjust coaching in your organisation:

- Do you feel you have an appropriate number of employees to coach? Would having more or fewer coachees make you more successful?
- Do you feel like you have the resources you need to coach your employees? If not, what would you like access to?
- Are there any other skills you'd like to learn to improve your coaching ability?

## Final Thoughts

Every employee can benefit from coaching, but it takes a specific approach and perspective to give individuals the coaching

support they need. The coach role is very different from the typical manager role. However, with the right training and support from you and your company's leaders, your great managers can also be great coaches.

Here are some next steps for you to take to set your managers up as coaches:

- Have a discussion about the differences between coaching and managing. Be sure to provide examples of how a coach and a manager might approach the same situation differently
- Define the goals of your coaching programme and identify metrics you can track to judge its success
- Start providing your managers with coaching. If you don't have the resources to provide internal coaching research your external options
- Schedule long-term coach training for your managers. Remember to include frequent follow-up developmental sessions
- Provide managers with feedback on how well they're doing as a coach.



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