# Coaching in the Workplace

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The purpose of this article is to recognize the need of coaching skills within the workplace. In reviewing the approaches to coaching formats and implementing coaching processes organizations will find that coachees will experience noticeable growth, more confidence, focus, and self-worth. The underlying value will be organizations using some forms of coaching are more likely to experience higher employee retention.

I n an ever-changing world full of diversity and new opportunities the need for organizations to maintain valued employees is also on the increase. Organizations where coaching skills are implemented will notice improved performance and empowerment by the employees, and the employees will feel valued increasing the likelihood of staying with their organizations. This article reviews coaching formats, implementation, and the benefits of coaching.

## Change

There is a saying that the one thing constant in life is change. This is not only true for people but for organizations of well. Due to the post World War II era of globalization many changes have been made in the way organizations operate along with the goods and services they provide. From this period thru the 1960s the broad consensus in the U.S. favored liberal international trade policies. While the 1990s demonstrated weak productivity growth, slow wage growth, and increasing inequality; the optimistic picture of globalization was being challenged (Lerman & Schmidt). While the aggregate benefits of globalization may continue there are those who see large losses experienced by less-advantaged citizens, many of whom are said to lose from globalization. Technological advances alone have drastically changed the way each of us address our daily lives. Computers are smaller and faster, and through handheld smart devices we have at our fingertips a wealth of information. The labor makeup within organizations have drastically changed as well. Labor is facilitated through foreign locations where the cost of labor is vastly reduced, workers are spread throughout remote locations, and universities now hold classes online with students from around the globe.

With organizations realizing significant changes over a relatively short time they must decide how to address managing these changes and maintaining their workforce. This brings the initial question of what does globalization have to do with coaching? The correlation is the need for the workforce within these organizations to become more effective in the way they operate, to become more competitive, and to improve productivity. To address some of the issues organizations face today they have turned to the coaching industry for help. Executive coaches work with top leaders of an organization to help set expectations of their direct reports, make important decisions when tough decisions are facing them, and to meet the goals that are in front of them. Coaching isn't just for poor performers any more, organizations have also turned towards coaching for up and coming high-performers.

Coaching is all about change. It is the art, and science, of facilitating the professional learning and development of others through personal, one-to-one, on-the job training for skills and competence. Research shows coaching can significantly improve performance when conducted through structured dialog that has been strategically designed with meaningful goals, objectives, and outcome evaluation (Rolfe, 2010). With research showing these benefits the question of "why is it more organizations don't embrace coaching?" Organizations which embrace formal coaching initiatives, either thru external or internal coaches, make provisions both monetarily and timewise to make the most of their investment. Other organizations where coaching may be needed but not embraced have difficulty with the idea of investing in coaching. One primary reason is due to the perception that it is labor intensive, expensive, and difficult to assess. Another reason is that change may cause a disruption in a comfortable status quo (Rolfe, 2010). These are valid concerns, especially when the organization is not of significant size, is on a limited budget, or is a non-profit.

## Coaching Formats

In reviewing the format of coaching within organizations there two primary types involved – formal and informal. In the case of formal coaching the coach is external or may be internal to the organization.

### *External*

External coaches are primarily utilized for executives and higher-level management. This is due to the cost involved at this level. Advantages to utilizing external coaches are their expertise as they are more skilled and experienced in specialized areas, provide an open environment, and are unaffected by the organizations internal culture or politics (Newton & Bristoll, 2013).

External coaches typically have received more extensive coaching training than managers and have spent more time coaching people. Their training and experience is generally in more specialized areas. This means coachees may match an external coach that best matches the skills they are looking for in coaching (Newton & Bristoll, 2013). Utilizing an external coach also provides the coachee the opportunity to be more open in what is discussed. The political issues are removed, and it allows the coach to provide more objective feedback.

## *Internal*

Internal coaches on the other hand are more readily available and easier on the budget as they do not have direct costs that hiring an external coach would. In instances where the internal coach is also the coachee's direct manager then the coach already has knowledge of the coachee and allows for the quicker building of mutual trust and respect (Newton & Bristoll, 2013). The internal coach will also be aware of organizational culture.

Internal coaches are at times also the team manager. In these situations, the coach/team manager is able to have more opportunity to influence thru their interactions than an external coach would. In either scenario when fulfilling the role of the coach it is important to remember that the traditional manager role of command and control is inappropriate. When the manager is in the coaching role the manager-coach needs to be more:

- Collaborative instead of controlling
- Delegating more responsibility
- Talking less and listening more
- Giving fewer orders and asking more questions
- Giving specific feedback instead of making judgements (Newton & Bristoll, 2013).

One of the biggest challenges in utilizing internal coaches is conflict of interest, especially when managers coach their direct reports. It may also occur when the coach knows the coachee in some other way, like working on the same team or in the same department. (Wilson, Developing a Coaching Culture, 2011). The key in these types of situations is dependent upon the level of trust the coachee has with the coach and the capability of the coach to maintain a high level of confidence even when pressured by higher ups.

## *Informal*

An informal coaching environment is one where the interaction is more random or not planned. It may be a hallway discussion, or in the breakroom, or during a phone conversation. However, the typical coaching questions may still be asked which makes it an informal coaching setting. Questions of "what would you like the outcome to be", or "how do you plan on meeting that goal"? In these settings the person asking the questions is exploring the current situation and the desired situation and is more likely to help them see their way to a solution (Wilson, 2011). This is where I personally have had the most experience in coaching with others. Not being a coach where it is my primary designated responsibility I often socialize with others while working on team projects or in cross-project settings. While more likely than not the questioning is related to the workplace I do take the opportunities to ask about their personal lives, families, friends, and hobbies while keeping an open ear for anything that may indicate any out of balance situations.

## Implementing a Coaching Program

While many large organizations with ample budgets have implemented coaching programs, there are many other organizations that haven't. The immediate question is why? The initial reasons are more to do with budget and buy-in than with choosing the program itself (2011). When

considering a coaching program within an organization one of the first tasks is to make the case for the value of coaching. While some there may be some that do understand the benefits of coaching and what coaching is, there will be some that do not. This is where an explanation of what coaching is benefits the organization. It is not to be looked at as remediation for an employee on a performance improvement plan, or to coach teams to work harder or train them to do their jobs better (Ramey-Renk, 2017).

To gain buy-in it may be beneficial to start small by considering a pilot program. A plan needs to be developed to help make the case. Wilson (2011) lists ten points in developing a coaching culture:

1. Vision and purpose
2. Organizational health check
3. Identifying stakeholders
4. Getting buy-in
5. Where to start
6. What to measure
7. Tangible benefits
8. Implement pilots
9. Evaluation and forward planning
10. Maintain the momentum.

In presenting this concept, select a small group of managers, hold conversations with each of them while providing an outline of how the program would work and the intended benefits. Give them time to digest the concepts, then meet with them again, giving them the opportunity to make refinements (Ramey-Renk, 2017). Gaining input from leaders from the beginning will help create a more robust pilot that can further prove the value of internal coaching. Ask for a small list of employees or team members who would benefit from the pilot program. Obtaining a list is another means of garnering buy in from leadership. Having buy in is important as one of the biggest challenges to workplace coaching is finding the time to coach or be coached (Wilson, 2011).

Using a project management approach, as the pilot program takes place there should be periodic meetings between the coaches and stakeholders to measure progress and refine the program as necessary. Once the pilot has concluded, conduct a lessons learned meeting to understand what went well and what didn't. The outcomes from this type of discussion can be used as the basis for adjusting the next round of coaching.

In launching a coaching program within an organization one practice to avoid is a "train the trainer" scenario where the organization hires an external coach with the intent that those being coached will then become internal coaches and train others within the organization. Having a coach, being a coach, and teaching coaching skills to others are three very different areas (Wilson, 2011). The first will not provide the necessary skills for the other two.

## Relationships

While the reason for needing a coach and how coaching may be implemented are important, the most important component is the coaching relationship. This explains why the International Coaching Federation (ICF) has placed a significant number of its competencies in the area of Co-Creating the Relationship. One of the most critical areas of the relationship is establishing trust and becoming intimate with the client. The ICF considers this competency as the ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust. In establishing trust, the coach and coachee must build rapport. This can be initiated when the matching of a coach to coachee occurs.

Three characteristics that are key to matching a coach to a coachee are: 1.) commonality in personal characteristics or experiences, 2.) compatibility in behavioral preferences, and 3.) credibility with coaching abilities to meet the client's needs (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010). In having common experiences, it gives both the coach and coachee something they both can discuss openly and relate to. This can include sports, hobbies, and special interests to name a few. Being compatible includes having similar behavioral attributes, managerial styles, and learning styles. If one person is highly organized and the other isn't, it may make it difficult to move forward with the relationship. Having compatible personalities and behavior styles are expected to have a better working relationship particularly with securing commitment and supporting collaboration (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010). Having credibility means the coach possesses the necessary credentials to meet client needs and include coaching competence and experience.

Four processes that the coaching relationship consists of are: rapport, trust, commitment, and collaboration (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010). Having a good and continual rapport plays a large part in keeping the relationship moving forward. Effectively coaching the client through change requires good communication skills. Building rapport continues to grow throughout the coaching relationship and allows each to appreciate, recognize, and respect one another as individuals (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010).

Trust allows the client to be open, honest, and vulnerable while the coach is allowed to be supportive, non-judgmental, and challenging (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010). The time it takes to build and establish trust may be somewhat dependent upon how the coachee views the coaching relationship. As previously indicated, external coaches sometimes allow for more openness for the coachee and the internal politics are removed. Yet, with an internal coach where there is an already established relationship between the coachee and the coach, the trust level may be quicker to obtain.

Commitment is key in accomplishing goals. When a coachee specifies actions, they will take in order to reach a goal the coach needs to ensure the coachee commits to completing the actions by specified times. Essential to the coaching effectiveness is the encouragement and sustaining individual commitment of the coachee by the coach (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010). By maintaining strong personal commitments will result into behavioral performance.

The collaborative effort of having rapport, building trust, and obtaining commitment will result in objectives being met and behavioral changes to take place. It is thru this process where the coachee

will at some point experience the "aha" moments and begin to realize the benefits of being coached.

## *Benefits*

Unlike products where there are direct costs and sales in which to determine a monetary return on investment, the return on investment for coaching results is not always as direct. In not knowing how to create the correct internal set up and original expectations organizations do not always see the measurable results of the coaching experience. Often, senior managers are not properly educated in the processes that must be followed to make sure the implementation of a coaching culture produces significant results in terms of return on investment (Ashley-Timms, 2012).

In order to demonstrate success in coaching and the return on investment there are important steps that need to be taken. First, there must be clear definition as to why coaching needs to take place. One condition in which coaching should be implemented is when the effectivity of top level and higher-level management needs improvement. As noted thru the utilization of external coaches it is imperative to properly match the executive with the coach most appropriate for the specific coaching needs. Second, without clearly defined goals and identifying actions that will drive towards these goals, nothing will change (Ashley-Timms, 2012). Each goal must be specific and time-restricted in order to measure success, else they will fail before they have the chance to succeed. To help determine successful measures ask the following questions:

1. How will you know you have succeeded in your overall strategy and in your goals with each stakeholder?
2. How will you monitor your progress (Ulrich, 2008)?

In his first inaugural address President Franklin D. Roosevelt said the "Only Thing We Have to Fear Is Fear Itself". He stated this to address the nations' fear during the great depression. Organizations and those being coached within the organizations need to embrace change. Coaching is all about change. What is the point of being coached if fear or maintaining the status quo is preventing change? Ashley-Timms (2012) writes that managers must overcome their fears in order to enjoy the positive effects of coaching and that if you continue to perform the same actions; you will continue to achieve the same unimpressive results.

The lack of continuity in the changes being implemented after the coaching sessions end is where organizations often fail. This can occur when companies have the belief that coaches will come in, right their wrongs, and leave again are unpleasantly surprised (Ashley-Timms, 2012). Coaching should not be looked as a remedy to a problem but more as a way to achieve a higher performance culture. This leads into sustaining the changes implemented. Ashley-Timms (2012) writes that once implemented, the coaching culture should remain an everyday part of running within the workplace, with scheduled follow-ups and measurable longer-term successes. This will lead to a self-perpetuating coaching culture where employees are regularly seeking feedback of their managers and striving for positive reinforcement (Ashley-Timms, 2012).

In a report reviewing the return on investment for an executive coaching program in the workplace of a Fortune 500 firm, Wilson (2004) writes the survey found that a 529% ROI and significant

intangible benefits to the business was produced. Within the survey, seventy-seven percent of the respondents indicated that coaching had significant or very significant impact on at least one of the nine business measures.

## Summary

This article has reviewed some of the aspects surrounding the subject of coaching in the workplace. While the areas of the reason for change, coaching formats, implementing a coaching program, relationships, benefits, and return on investment were discussed, there is much more literature available that relates to the primary topic. Before implementing a coaching process within the workplace, the organization needs to first define the need for coaching and what the desired outcomes are. Setting clear and concise goals for person being coached, identifying measurements of success, and determining upfront how the return on investment is realized are necessary steps before the actual coaching occurs. How much the organization is willing to spend will help determine whether to hire an external coach or to utilize an internal coach. Whichever type of coaching is implemented it is also extremely important the organization ensures the proper matching of the coach to the coachee and allows for coaching relationship to flourish. In doing so they increase the level of success in the coaching process as a whole.

## About the Author

Mark Tompkins is a May 2018 graduate from Regent University receiving a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership degree with his concentration in Leadership Coaching and Mentoring. Prior to that, he completed his undergraduate studies at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana in 1984 with his major being in Computer Science and minor in Foundations of Business. Currently, Mark is the senior business systems analyst on the Business Intelligence and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) projects at the Christian Broadcasting Network, Virginia Beach, Virginia. He is also leading a Business Analysis Techniques class with a hybrid curriculum of business analysis and coaching skills through the use of active listening and open-ended questioning. Mark is the current vice president of International Institute of Business Analysis, Hampton Roads chapter, has worked in the newspaper, manufacturing, financial, truck, recreational vehicle, defense, and government industries. Questions or comments regarding this article may be directed to the author at: marktompkinscoachingconsulting@gmail.com.

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