

# The Key To Effective Coaching

Coaching focuses on helping another person learn in ways that let him or her keep growing afterward. It is based on asking rather than telling, on provoking thought rather than giving directions and on holding a person accountable for his or her goals.

Broadly speaking, the purpose is to increase effectiveness, broaden thinking, identify strengths and development needs and set and achieve challenging goals. Research from the Center for Creative Leadership has boiled down the skills managers need to coach others into five categories:

1) *Building the relationship.* It's easier to learn from someone you trust. Coaches must effectively establish boundaries and build trust by being clear about the learning and development objectives they set, showing good judgment, being patient and following through on any promises and agreements they make.

2) *Providing assessment.* Where are you now and where do you want to go? Helping others to gain self-awareness and insight is a key job for a coach. You provide timely feedback and help clarify the behaviors that an employee would like to change. Assessment often focuses on gaps or inconsistencies, on current performance vs. desired performance, words vs. actions and intention vs. impact.

3) *Challenging thinking and assumptions.* Thinking about thinking is an important part of the coaching process. Coaches ask open-ended questions, push for alternative solutions to problems and encourage reasonable risk-taking.

4) *Supporting and encouraging.* As partners in learning, coaches listen carefully, are open to the perspectives of others and allow employees to vent emotions without judgment. They encourage employees to make progress toward their goals, and they recognize their successes.

5) *Driving results.* What can you show for it? Effective coaching is about achieving goals. The coach helps the employee set meaningful ones and identify specific behaviors or steps for meeting them. The coach helps to clarify milestones or measures of success and holds the employee accountable for them.

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