

CLASSIC COACHING

Here's how to implement a successful coaching program.

In today's tough distribution industry environment, manufacturers, manufacturers' representatives and distributors can't afford anything less than outstanding performance. To obtain this level of performance, your managers must do a good job coaching your people and know how to get the most out of them.

Business coaching uses some of the same principles as sports coaching. When we think of the best coaches in sports history — the Green Bay Packers' Vince Lombardi, Alabama's Bear Bryant, UCLA's John Wooden, Indiana's Bobby Knight, the New England Patriots' Bill Belichick, USC's Pete Carroll and Duke's Mike Krzyzewski come to mind. Setting a goal is not the main achievement — it's deciding how to achieve your goal by developing a performance plan for every employee and then executing it.

To keep your team members' productivity at the highest level, you need to implement a formal coaching program in your organization. Coaching improves job performance, increases employee responsibilities, improves communication and increases employee satisfaction. In any team sport, a coach serves as a teacher and a motivator. He or she challenges you and holds you accountable. A coach keeps an unwavering focus on the achievement of both team and individual goals.

GAME PLAN

Coaching is a performance management partnership between managers and their employees. When done right, it's a collaborative goal-setting process. You listen to each other review results that were achieved or exceeded performance expectations and then ask questions, share views and negotiate solutions upon reviewing results that did not reach performance expectations. Coaches are responsible for:

- Developing and communicating their performance expectations and priorities to their employees.
- Accepting input from their employees about these performance expectations and adjusting all of them as appropriate.
- Observing employee behavior and results and providing continuous feedback on performance.
- Acknowledging successes and working through obstacles that inhibit goal attainment.
- Conducting a monthly coaching session with each

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MONTHLY COACHING REPORT	
Name:	Coach:
Date:	Next meeting date & time:
List accomplishments:	
Goals/Action tasks:	Due date:

employee and providing them with actionable feedback. To help you track your success in accomplishing these goals you can use the "Monthly Coaching Report" shown above.

3-STEP COACHING PROCESS

Step 1: Preparation. During each month, keep notes about every employee's job performance. Write a discussion plan of the things you want to cover in your coaching session, including a listing of accomplishments, performance goals and action tasks. Require each employee to come to their coaching session with a discussion plan that lists accomplishments, performance goals and action tasks.

Step 2: Discussion. Lead off every coaching session with positives. Start off by listing the employee's accomplishments from both discussion plans on the coaching report. Next list goals/action tasks with due dates on the coaching report from each of your discussion plans. Check each item from your discussion plans as you discuss it in your coaching session, and review your previous coaching report. Check off completed goals/action tasks and move them to accomplishments. Move incomplete goals/action tasks to the new coaching report.

Foster a collaborative problem-solving partnership. When a problem arises, work together to identify the specific problem and agree upon the step-by-step solutions. Effective coaching requires asking questions such as:

■ What was your greatest frustration and biggest challenge this month?

■ What was your most exciting, fulfilling or successful achievement?

■ How are you feeling about your current position/career with this company?

■ How could I be a better coach?

In addition to asking questions, key coaching skills include active listening, providing constructive feedback and knowing how to stretch employees without causing them to fail. Candid discussions about career satisfaction and personal development can have a profound effect on loyalty and performance while strengthening and building trust between the coach and employee. Seek opportunities to assist employee development through special assignments or projects that provide increase responsibilities.

Step 3: Follow-up. The manager completes the coaching report, provides a copy for the employee and schedules a follow-up coaching session with date and time. Then the manager checks on progress weekly, gathering feedback on what's going well and what's not going well. The manager should reinforce positive progress and develop alternative

action plans when progress is not going well.

After every coaching session ask yourself two questions: "What worked well?" and, "What might you have done better?" When you get right down to it, coaching is the bulk of a manager's job. Performance management requires constant, thoughtful feedback and factual data on individual performance. If your managers and associates set mutually agreed-upon performance goals and execute formal constructive coaching sessions, your employees will consistently attain or exceed their performance targets.

Manufacturers, manufacturers' representatives and distributors who continually focus on performance management will maximize their profitability through our current uncertain economy and beyond. ■

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