

A QUESTION OF COACHING



In a new series, **Gladeana McMahon** addresses the issues faced by coaches in the course of their work

Gladeana McMahon is vice president and Fellow of the Association for Coaching, director of professional coaching standards for Cedar TM and co-director of the Centre for Coaching. She can be contacted via www.gladeanamcmahon.com

I am a manager and my company is rolling out a series of coaching skills courses for all its managers. I am sceptical as my job is to manage and, while I like to see myself as supportive, I don't have the time to listen to people's problems and get the job done as well. Surely people just need to be told what to do so that they can do it?

Like so many organisations today, we have cut our head count and those of us who are left have more to do. Is this just the latest management fad or will it really help me and my team to get better results?

This is a challenging time for many organisations and, as you quite rightly say, as a manager you have to be able to manage. You want to encourage your direct reports to work as effectively as possible and this means helping them clearly communicate with you and with each other, pool their talents to ensure the best outcomes are achieved and keep those inevitable personality issues to a minimum.

Developing coaching skills will allow you to help people take more responsibility for their work and increase their sense of engagement. The more self-sufficient and effective they are, the less time you will need to spend monitoring their work – thereby enabling you to spend more time on aspects such as strategic thinking.

Traditional styles of management may be effective for some of the time but are limited in their ability to give you effective access to people's potential. Command and control tends to work best when the boss remains on the premises. Once you are absent, things are more likely to break down: people are less likely to be self-activated, preferring to wait and let you tell them what to do because they know that is what is going to happen in the long run anyway.

Performance coaching as a management tool gives the responsibility for his own development and career back to the individual.

Coaching skills training will help you listen more effectively and ask better questions that promote independent thinking. All this will then translate into increasing effective actions. Such

skills increase your ability to give constructive feedback and help you deal more effectively with conflict.

The 2003 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development report *Understanding the People and Performance Link: Unlocking the Black Box* quoted a study by the International Coaching Federation showing that, in organisations that had introduced coaching skills, 68 per cent of those surveyed reported increased self-awareness, 62 per cent developed better goal-setting abilities, 57 per cent reported lower stress levels, 40 per cent experienced better communication skills, 36 per cent felt coaching had helped increase project completion and 33 per cent experienced better relationships with their co-workers.

As a manager, there are times when it is inappropriate to use your coaching skills, such as during disciplinary proceedings. But given the proven benefits of coaching and the likelihood that you can create more time to devote to things such as your own thought leadership, which, in turn, will increase the impact you have on others at all levels of the organisation, how can you lose? ■

Manager's coaching skills tips

1. Give individuals your full attention – you may be able to multitask but it gives the impression you are not interested. Turn away from your screen and leave your BlackBerry in its holder.
2. Demonstrate active listening by paraphrasing what the person has said. This not only shows you are listening but helps the other person process his own thoughts too.
3. Ask open questions (what, where, how, when and why). Instead of saying "talk to John about this", say "who do you think would be able to help you gain the information you need?" That way, you get your direct report to start thinking independently and he won't need to come back to you next time. Only tell when someone doesn't know - no amount of questions will help if he truly has no idea.