



Coaching: The Key to Performance Improvement

Question: What do driving a car, selling a computer, riding a bike, managing others and playing tennis have in common?

Answer: They're all skills we acquire through practice, instruction and hands-on coaching. In fact, this is how we become proficient at any skill or task.

If your goal is to help other people improve their proficiency and competence at performing a specific task, then your role is to coach. Sometimes coaching involves passing along knowledge, but that's only a small part of coaching. A coach's real goal is to help a person become more talented at performing. For instance, a teacher could conduct driver education classes, but it would take a coach to conduct successful driver training.

The personal skill of coaching is a powerful tool. It's the only way to bring about genuine performance improvement in others. Like any other skill, coaching is a process that you need to learn and practice in order to use effectively. Here are the essential rules of coaching:

1. Set expectations. Clearly state your expectations and goals and explain why they're desirable both for the individual and the organization.
2. Observe performance. Observe and determine the performer's needs in these areas: knowledge of what to do, skillfulness at execution, willingness and confidence level, and any barriers limiting performance.
3. Coach. Execute appropriate improvement methods in incremental stages: giving advice, coaching for direct skill-building, creating challenge and inventing better tools or removing barriers to performance.
4. Measure and evaluate the result. Compare all behaviors to results and results to goals. Raise or lower targets based on the performer's current competence level.

Repeat this process in order to encourage continuous improvement. When coaching others, always state the success result you want; acknowledge every success, no matter how small; point toward solutions instead of critiquing errors; and try to end every interaction with a "win". This will cause the coaching interaction to be a positive event, which will make your coaching more likely to be accepted and more likely to stick.

Any of the following approaches to coaching could be appropriate in a given situation.

- Overlook minor problems that are relatively unimportant.
- Relieve some workload temporarily by offering/asking for help.
- Avoid premature failures by adjusting goals.
- Stop destructive influences and behaviors.
- Challenge the excuses that lead to failure.
- Explore options and alternatives.
- Analyze, advise and act.
- Practice, rehearse, experiment.
- Celebrate, congratulate, reward.

Commit to success and demonstrate that commitment to others.

Coaching, like any other interactive skill, is most useful when it connects with the person being coached. There is no right way, but there are many appropriate ways to coach. Your observation and assessment skills will eliminate all the guesswork.

A good coach is long remembered, greatly admired and amply rewarded so becoming an effective coach is a worthy goal. Just remember to heed your own coaching advice: practice your coaching skills, just as you coach others to practice to improve their own skills.

Improving Coaching through PAR

The PAR skills are essential for coaching. We recommend combining the program we call [Leadership and Teamwork](#) (This links to Leadership and Teamwork program page), which focuses on influence and coaching skills, with other coaching resources, such as our Manager's Coaching Guides for a highly effective overall coaching program.