

The Executive as Management Coach

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When managers who report to you add value to the organization, their contributions and successes propel your organization forward. These contributions and successes also reflect on you and make your life more manageable. That's why your investment in developing the managers who surround you is so pivotal.

- When your top performers keep learning and growing, they are more likely to stay.
- Your middle performers will appreciate your investment and receive guidance to help them become more effective.
- By coaching your lower performers, you will see their needs and capabilities up close, give them solid support and a chance to improve, and then feel clearer about who is a keeper.

How Can YOU Develop Your Managers? Ten Tips

1. **Share the big picture. Make it clear where your organization is going.** Not only will your managers be better able to lead. You will also be better able to let go of control, because you will trust that you're all on the same page.
2. **Coach, delegate and empower.** Don't over-direct or dump. After ensuring alignment, entrust and guide.
3. **Encourage an "experimenter" mindset.** Managers and your organization are better served by a "live and learn" attitude than a judgmental "success or failure" approach. Urge managers to take calculated risks, reflecting on the process and outcomes, learning and applying what they learn from the experience. If you don't actively encourage risk-taking, albeit calculated risk-taking, managers might be stuck in the mire of status quo thinking driven by apprehension about failing.
4. **Define active learning as a necessity and a job expectation.** Insist on active learning as a core competency that is prerequisite to strengthening the multiple competencies called for by today's challenges. Evaluate managers on the *active learning* competency in every performance review.
5. **Show. Don't just tell.** Be a role model of the leadership competencies you want. Demonstrate the mindset and skills key to mobilizing change and change leadership. Become self-conscious about this and pursue learning opportunities so that you can show managers the way.
6. **Tune in to each manager as an individual, so you can aid their learning.** Hold conversations with them to learn what makes them tick. Then, match your help and coaching to their needs, styles and preferences. Engage them in shaping their own development process.
7. **Provide diverse learning opportunities.** Support different strokes for different folks. Consider buddies, mentors, action learning projects, discussions of case scenarios in staff meetings, peer presentations, reading and training. Insist on the destination, while allowing and supporting different paths.
8. **Hold courageous conversations with individuals and your team.** Give direct, constructive feedback. Express your frustrations. Confront behavior and resistance that impedes progress and change.
9. **Come to terms with the fact that learning takes TIME.** Invest time in coaching

your managers now, and you'll enhance organization's capabilities, saving time later. And don't begrudge managers who pursue job-related learning opportunities within work time.

10. **You can't do it all.** Know that only by fully deploying all leaders, you make your life more manageable.

Great Conversations Help You Help Your Managers Learn

A great coach understands that helping someone develop involves establishing a relationship. The more information you have about how your people like to be supported, the easier it will be for you to build on their strengths and bolster their weaknesses.

Find out what your managers bring to the challenges they face. Get to know your managers as individuals so you can more effectively support them. Use any of the following "Conversations" to focus your discussions. You can even include these as five or ten minute components of your regular meetings with individuals. It's amazing how much you can learn in a brief five minute investment in listening, using a focused set of questions. As well as you know your direct reports, you'll learn a lot that you don't already know and gain an even better sense of possible directions for constructive coaching. Also, your team will feel your care and intention to support them.

Find Out about their Strengths and Motivations.

This will help you to delegate appropriate projects and otherwise build on and benefit from their strengths.

Talents: What are personal skills and assets that you bring to this job? What do you do well and want to build on?

Passion: What do you care about in or out of work? What gets you excited? What are you eager to learn more about?

Experience: What have you done or experienced in the past that could help our team or group? What life experience do you have that you know could be valuable?

Challenges: What are some opportunities you would like to explore? Are there areas you want to work on or develop?

Future: If there were no obstacles, nothing in your way, what would you like to be doing in five years? What would you like to do in the year ahead within this job to help move in that direction?

Find Out about Perceptions of Upcoming Job Challenges.

When you know more about their thoughts and feelings and concerns about what's ahead for them, you'll know better how to focus your support.

1. Tell me how you feel about your management challenges at this point.

2. What do you like most about the challenges ahead for you in your job?

3. What about the challenges ahead concern you?

4. How will the changes ahead be GOOD for you?

5. How might the challenges ahead NOT be good for you?

6. What do you find well-equipped to do to make the changes happen? What do you feel especially good at?

7. What do you feel you're not so good at? What would like to be able to do better?

8. How can I help you lead the changes ahead?

Help Your Managers Reflect on and Savor Their Successes.

Help them to savor these successes. In today's environment with overload and multiple priorities, it's not unusual for people to focus on what hasn't been accomplished yet.

1. Ask the individual to think about a recent success. "There are times in our careers when we feel really good about what we're doing and contributing. Think about a time when you felt you were at your best. This could involve an experience with a customer or a coworker or a project or goal. The key is that you felt successful in that situation."

2. Probe for the whole story of this success.

- What was the situation?
- What did you do?
- What did you think about it?
- What were your feelings then?
- What was the outcome?
- How did you feel about yourself and your work as a result of this experience?
- What is it about you that you think contributed to your success?
- What support or wise counsel did you find helpful in the process?
- How is this situation like or unlike other situations at work?
- What can I do to help you have more successful experiences in this job?

3. Thank them for sharing this with you, mentioning specifically a couple of highlights that particularly impressed you.

Find Out about Individual Communication Preferences

This information helps you consider ways you can tailor your communications and expectations to the individual's preferred modes of operating.

1. **Meetings:** How often do you like to meet when you are working on a project?

2. **Communication:** How do you prefer to be communicated with? Email, weekly face-to-face meetings, phone calls, a combination?

3. **Status Reporting:** I would like you to keep me up to date on how you're doing and where you are in relation to the timeline we've established. How would you prefer to keep me up to date?

4. **Feedback:** How do you like to receive feedback? Written, face-to-face, written summary before face to face. And how often?

5. **Autonomy:** How much autonomy or independence do you prefer when you are working on a project?

Set Managers Up for Success in Specific Projects

Create the conditions, clarity and expectations upfront that make managers more likely to succeed and *you* more willing to let go of control. This tool helps to anticipate and remove roadblocks.

1. What do you think might get in your way or make this effort difficult for you?

2. Then, dig for specifics by posing these possible roadblocks, hearing out the manager's concerns, and addressing them early on.

- Unclear goals and guidelines
- Red tape
- Not enough time
- Lack of cooperation from others
- Insufficient access to you for help and support
- All criticism, no praise or appreciation

Coaching around Specific Projects

Use the following Coaching Model to plan ahead for coaching interactions. Also, take this model with you into a coaching session to remind you of the steps in a constructive, respectful approach.

| Process Step | Why This Step Is Important |
|---|---|
| Describe the goal and why it is important | People need to see the big picture |
| Invite the manager's point of view on both the goal and performance | People need to feel heard and validated. There may be different sides to the issue. |
| Invite manager to generate ideas and solutions. | People need to be part of the solution. |
| Respect, acknowledge and build on the manager's ideas. | People need you to support their ideas and guide them in new ways. |
| Summarize and agree on a plan. | Both of you need a shared vision to avoid misunderstanding. |
| Work together to identify responsibilities and timelines; keep maximum responsibility with manager. | People need to be clear on their commitments and responsibilities. |
| Build manager's confidence and self-esteem all the while. | People need to know you have faith in their abilities. |

Address the Importance of Coaching with Your Leadership Colleagues

Devote a management team meeting to an exploration of meaningful coaching.



Leader Meeting: "Coaching Is Critical!"

Instructions to the group: Think of a coach significant in your life, someone who really helped you to perform at a higher level. Tell your partner about this person and explain the circumstances.

- What did this person do to bring out the best in you?
- What did this person do or say to help you feel good about yourself and your abilities?
- What were the most important lessons you learned from this person?
- How can you apply what you learned from this person to your coaching approach with your team?

Finally, Think like a Coach

To be an effective coach, you have to believe in coaching! Catch yourself thinking thoughts that *discourage* you from empowering team members. Then, replace these thoughts with thoughts that *encourage* you to coach and empower.

| Leaders with a “directing” style often think these thoughts. | Consider these thoughts instead.... |
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| “Coaching will eat away at my precious time.” | By coaching, you build capability that you can deploy toward your objectives. |
| “If I coach people to do the work, I’ll lose control.” | By coaching, you learn about what each individual can do. And they learn your agenda, so they can make decisions in alignment with it. |
| “If I give managers greater responsibility, they’ll make mistakes, and I’ll be blamed. The buck stops here.” | By coaching instead of “dumping” work on people without guidance, you minimize the risks. If you don’t give people more responsibility, they will remain stuck. More and more and more of the work will rest on you. |
| “Most people just want me to tell them what to do.” | That may be true of some. But there is far too much for you to do than watch over each person’s shoulder to give them frequent direction. Your life will only be manageable if you help them learn to think and function with some level of independence. |
| “If I teach my staff to do the work too well, I won’t be needed anymore.” | Every success by managers you supervise is your success. And if you coach and develop people, there will be many more of them. |
| “These people don’t have what it takes.” | Are you sure? First, give them ample, specific feedback. Clarify the improvements you expect. If the person doesn’t then change, develop or get needed help, there is a mismatch between their skills and the organization’s needs. You need to surround yourself with people who can add value. Cut the cord. |

It’s All about Leverage

By taking an active and proactive role in developing your management team, you expand and leverage their strengths and yours. Customers, staff and the organization all benefit.