



Coaching Skills Training For Managers - *Improve workplace morale & reduce manager stress*

By Jennifer McCoy

Did you know?

- A study released in 2004 by Human Synergistics, an international organisational development firm, reported that “90% of Australians work in a negative culture of blame, indecision and conformity”, based on a study of 900 major organisations and more than 130,000 employees(1).
- A 12-month study of 1300 senior Australian executives found that managers focus on what is bad about their employees rather than what is good - “**I only hear from my boss when I stuff up**”. As a result they create a passive defensive culture where employees avoid responsibility and pass blame(2).

Faced with cold hard facts like these, it's difficult to deny that business outcomes must surely be improved if workplace culture was more positive; if managers only worked more constructively with their staff.

The Real Problem – Communication Skills

Ask managers what they find most difficult about their job, “What keeps you awake at night?”, and they'll often say “Dealing with staff”. They might talk about the frustrations of trying to motivate their staff or explaining (yet again) to someone how to manage their work commitments, delegate responsibility and encourage accountability in their team members.

More specifically they're likely to add, “I don't know how to confront a member of my staff who.....”, or “How do I help a staff member to..... – without destroying their confidence” or “How do I encourage staff not to come to me always to solve their problems?”; or “How do you develop a team, create a positive climate, deal with negative people?”

Sound familiar? Sensitive communication isn't easy, no matter where you sit in the organisation. More importantly though is the concern felt by these managers, rightly or wrongly, that they must provide the solutions; and they acknowledge they don't have the right words to deal with the situations.

How coaching works

Coaching is a formal process based on a framework of trust, mutual respect and strict confidence. A coach has a responsibility not simply to be nice; while the the 'coachee', or employee, must accept accountability for making and keeping commitments.

Coaching skills include respectful discussion, skilful questioning to uncover where problems might lie, guided reflection to identify what strengths can be brought to the situation, and what new strategies might comfortably be applied. All provide simple strategies, even some of the

words to say, when handling difficult situations, and just as importantly, for developing people by encouraging them to demonstrate their real capabilities.

Coaching tools allow both the coach and “coachee” to distance the situation from the personal, increasing objectivity to allow honesty and confidence to emerge.

Could managers and team leaders benefit from coaching skills? Could they use them to lead their teams more effectively?

What managers say about coaching skills

Given some training in coaching skills, here’s what some managers have said:

- “I will probably listen a little more closely at the beginning of an interview without pre-judging situations”
- “I developed an understanding that coaching takes place in a relationship”
- “Coaching has made me more accountable to myself”.
- “I was able to use questioning techniques to help one of my staff members prioritise his work schedule. I kept asking ‘Why....’ and ‘Why did you make that decision?’ and “What will happen if...”, so that he would know what were the important issues. I think it gives anyone a real boost in confidence if they can sort out their own concerns; and it feels good to be able to help – just by asking the right questions(3)..

These people are not yet skilled coaches, but they feel more confident about working with their staff; plus they now have a greater understanding of interpersonal skills - and leadership. They no longer reflect their need to provide the solutions. Nor is there any suggestion of blame or indecision here; simply respect and the confidence that they can use a new set of skills to help their staff solve their own problems.

References

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2. S. McCarthy: “The culture-performance connection” reported in CCH Daily Email Alert July 28, 2004 www.cch.com.au
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About the Author

Jennifer McCoy is a co-author and facilitator of AIM’s new short course “Coaching Skills for Managers”. For further details and dates of this course visit www.aimvic.com.au/coursedirectory.

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