Coaching

Your Role as Coach

COACHING IS THE PROCESS by which individuals gain the skills, abilities, and knowledge they need to develop themselves professionally and become more effective in their jobs. When people are coached, they can increase both their performance in their current jobs and their potential to do more in the future.

Coaching has received much attention in recent years, as companies hire professional coaches—usually retired executives or consultants with psychological training—to prepare managers and executives with high potential to take on greater responsibility within their organizations. Experts estimate that there are more than 10,000 professional coaches worldwide. A 1999 study of human resources professionals found that 90 percent of U.S. companies offered some form of coaching to top executives, for the purpose of leadership development and/or ensuring success after promotions or hire. Other uses for coaching are improved teamwork, improved relationships with peers, and reduced conflict.

Not only are companies offering coaches to executives and managers, but they are being asked for them by their employees. At one time, needing an industrial psychologist as an executive coach might be an indictment of poor management or leadership capability. No more. Managers and executives have come to recognize how a coach, internal or external, can help them identify their strengths and weaknesses, set goals, and discover creative answers to operational problems. Some gurus have attributed the interest of managers in having their own coach to the use of 360-degree feedback programs that identify unexpected interpersonal shortcomings. Whatever has prompted this importance placed on coaching, it is also responsible for greater recognition of the manager's role in employee job success.

Managers who master the skill of coaching find that it can boost the performance of workers by making clear to them what they should do and how they should best do it (think *instruction*), positively reinforce good work (think *praise*), and find ways to redesign jobs or increase employee contribution (think *empowerment* or *shared leadership*).

But increased employee performance isn't the sole benefit of coaching. When employees receive regular feedback from you, you won't have to worry about their being surprised and defensive at performance appraisal time. And the good rapport that coaching creates should help reduce complaints from your employees. Everything should run more smoothly—or, at least, as well as it can in today's leaner organizations where crisis management is often the order of the day. Certainly, you won't have to worry so much about getting demerits from senior management for "people problems."

Instead, upper management will likely recognize your people skills. While it might seem that people skills don't get the attention they deserve, so long as they result in high productivity, which translates into decreased operating costs or increased income, then coaching can enhance your reputation.

Your Beliefs About People

Coaching begins with an assumption: Most employees are eager to do well, to please their managers, and to achieve as high a position as they can with the company. As coach, you can ensure that your employees do all three. Should this approach to performance management be contrary to your own mindset about your employees—that is, should you believe that, on the contrary, your employees don't care about their work, have no interest in pleasing you, and are quite happy going nowhere in their careers—then you may want to stop reading this section of the book and proceed to Section II, on counseling. Better still, continue to read.

Motivational research conducted by psychologist Abraham Maslow and others shows that most people have a genuine interest in bettering themselves and in achieving all that they can. You don't have to threaten or force employees to get them to increase their performance so long as you give them reason to do so. You don't have to offer financial rewards or promotions. Instead, by giving your employees the opportunity to increase their employability, by offering them assignments and providing training to help them grow beyond their current positions, and by creating an environment in which they feel free to share their ideas and will

get recognition for those ideas and their efforts to implement them, you are contributing to that sense of job satisfaction that can increase job performance.

And managers who are willing to coach their employees to realize their full potential and build their confidence will gain loyalty and respect. If you doubt the worth of this statement, what do you think is the value of the following?

- Employees who are oriented to corporate values and business intent and strategies
- Employees who are clear about your expectations for their performance and their priorities
- Employees who accept responsibility for their performance and are motivated to exceed their current performance

These benefits, too, come from coaching.

Managerial Resistance

Many managers argue that they don't have the time to coach employees. But coaching is not time-intensive; rather, the problems that result from *not* coaching can become time-intensive. If you don't continually work to develop your employees' skills, the additional work of operating in a leaner organization will wind up on your shoulders.

Another reason managers give for not coaching is that their employees don't need the added attention; they already know what is expected of them. But ask yourself, How little will it cost me to confirm this by assuming the role of coach in meetings with my employees? Or, put another way, How much will it cost me if I am wrong and my employees truly don't have a clear idea of my expectations or priorities?

Still another excuse that managers give for not coaching is that their employees should take responsibility for their own job development and their own careers. Yes, employees *are* ultimately responsible for their job development and careers. But managers who help to increase employees' employability receive two benefits: employees are better prepared to take on more responsibility, and they gain employee loyalty. Efforts to train employees beyond the level of their current jobs have been found to build greater employee commitment to corporate values and mission, as well as build a better relationship between employees and supervisors.

It doesn't matter if the employee is on-site every day of the week or just one day of the week. Just as you can supervise by phone and e-mail

a worker who operates from home, you can coach that individual by phone or e-mail (assuming there are no serious work problems or bad habits that need to be addressed in a face-to-face conversation). Think of those practices that are important for supervising someone off-site: (1) you have to set clear expectations, (2) you need to agree on performance standards and how results will be monitored, (3) you need to provide feedback on performance, and—most important—(4) you need to communicate, communicate, communicate. The first two practices enable you to provide the telecommuter with the third practice, feedback (think *coaching*). The work insights all depend on the last practice—the quality and frequency of your communications with the individual.

Put down that report you were reading and concentrate on what the off-site worker is telling you. Show the individual the respect he or she deserves by not doing anything else when you're on the phone with him or her. If you discover a problem in the making, then set a quiet time for you and the telecommuter to talk on the phone or, better yet, ask the individual to come to the office. Even better, if it is possible, schedule one day each month to meet the individual in person so he or she has the same in-person coaching time with you as you give on-site employees.

And for managers who argue that coaching has no place in today's horizontal organizations characterized by teamwork, that's not so. With today's cross-functional teams, coaching is the responsibility not only of every team leader but also of every team member. All team members have a responsibility to facilitate the work of other members by helping them understand the scope of the project, assisting them in fulfilling their responsibilities to the group, and sharing their experiences and insights to help get the tasks done.

As coach, team leaders help create the mission statement and the ground rules by which the team will operate to achieve its mission. Often, too, team leaders are responsible for the group's administrative details, like drawing up meeting agendas and recording and then distributing the minutes of each session. But, most important, team leaders need to help the group overcome any obstacles in achieving the goal— just as you as coach help your staff members accomplish their jobs by monitoring their progress on each assignment.

The Five Principles of Coaching

As a manager, you need five principal coaching skills. These are the same skills that the best sports coaches have.

1. *Ability to Gather Information.* A good coach knows how to get information from an individual without making that person feel as if he or she were being interrogated. Information is important in making numerous decisions, ranging from whether to hire a particular job candidate to identifying a skill deficiency, to uncovering confusion about how to do a particular job, to finding out an employee's interests and aspirations so as to redesign the job and thereby stimulate above-standard performance.

2. *Ability to Listen to Others.* Asking the right questions means little if you don't listen to the replies. A good coach is able to listen with a ''third ear,'' paying as much attention to the speaker's nonverbal signals and body posture as to his or her words in order to determine the feelings behind the response as well as its truthfulness. That same coach also knows how to use body language to communicate interest in what the speaker has to say. Throughout this book, there will be many guidelines offered about what to say and how to say it, whether you are coaching, counseling, or mentoring. Remember that verbal or body language means little if you don't truly listen to the person on the other side of the conversation.

Listening falls into three categories: (1) listening in bursts of energy, tuning in when the other party touches on a subject of interest or agreement, and then tuning out as he or she moves on to a point of disinterest or disagreement; (2) listening to the words spoken but not hearing their implications or the feelings behind the words; and (3) listening empathetically, hearing not only the words but also making an effort to grasp the speaker's thoughts and feelings. The best coaches practice *empathetic listening.* (As you will read later, the best counselors and mentors also suspend their own thoughts and feelings to give full attention to the individuals with whom they are talking.)

3. *Awareness of What's Happening Around You.* You should talk frequently to your employees to see if there are morale problems or other causes of distress in the workplace that could lower productivity or generate attitudinal problems or, better, notice signs that an employee is not only willing but also ready and able to assume more responsibility. Let's see how one coach keeps the lines of communication open.

ADRIENNE: HER ''OPEN DOOR'' POLICY

Adrienne is good at coaching, although the terms *manager* and *leader* are more often used to describe her strong points. Still, Adrienne is a

coach, in that she meets weekly with her team of copywriters to discuss progress on marketing assignments and to share with her team compliments from her boss and others in the organization about the fine work they are doing. But Adrienne doesn't limit her communications with her staff to these group meetings.

Adrienne's staff members know that all they need do is knock on her door to discuss a work problem or even a personal problem. Adrienne will also often stop at people's desks to chat about some project or other they are completing. Her goal is to gather information about any problems they are encountering, either because of skill gaps they have or difficulties they encounter within the very political consumer products company in which they work.

Such information, then, can become the basis for her one-on-one monthly meetings with each of her staff members, in which she talks about concerns either she or the employee has about the work. Sometimes these sessions lead to registering the staff member in a training program to develop his skills; sometimes they call for a meeting among Adrienne, the staff member, and the product manager to be sure that the copywriting department and product management are united in their goals; and sometimes they simply enable Adrienne to tell an employee just how fine a job he or she is doing. Whatever the result, Adrienne considers the sessions valuable because they keep her in touch with her staff's needs (including the need for an occasional pat on the back)—something that might not otherwise happen, given the many distractions in the office, if these exchanges were less formal.

4. *Ability to Instruct Employees.* A good coach is able to train employees, either singly or in a group. Even before that, the coach is able to conduct a training-needs assessment to determine gaps in knowledge that must be filled. (For more on this subject, see Chapter 2).

5. *Ability to Give Feedback.* A good coach knows how important feedback is in improving the performance of any employee. There is no such thing as having too little time to praise someone for a job well done or to provide corrective feedback, including suggestions that tell the employee you believe he or she is capable of doing the work right. In short, a good coach doesn't allow today's lean organizational structure to provide an excuse for *not* offering positive reinforcement of good work or corrective feedback in a positive manner.

MIKE AND THE SELF-IMPORTANT SUBORDINATE

Many managers wait until the first performance review to coach a new employee, which can allow bad habits to develop. That's what happened to Mike, head of a new product division in a major high-tech firm. He supervises five business-development teams. His newest recruit is Cora, who formerly had her own business and could crow about five patents attached to her name.

Mike hadn't thought it was necessary to review proper business protocol with someone with Cora's background. But it became clear very soon that Cora, with her entrepreneurial experience, considered herself a privileged person. She would arrive several hours late and leave an equal number of hours early. There were long lunch dates with customers, reputedly for the purpose of discussing a product idea, and, supposedly to stay abreast of industry developments, equally long visits to customers of her former company. She was late and, worse, didn't attend meetings Mike held with his direct reports to discuss product and marketing plans. Mike tried to ignore the problem—until he heard complaints from Cora's product team and his own supervisor.

Cora's team members felt that they weren't getting any direction. Cora called meetings and then canceled them minutes beforehand. Assignments given weren't reviewed; often, they were forgotten or, worse, reassigned to others on the same team. Cora claimed that her distraction was due to some family problems, but her employees began to wonder. "Cora seems so out of it," Jeff said to Nellie, a colleague, unaware that Mike could hear their conversation. "She may be on something," Nellie replied. "She can't seem to focus for more than a few minutes on anything."

Overburdened with work, Mike would have ignored the situation if his own boss, Claire, hadn't talked to him. She pointed to a list of tasks that Cora was letting slide. So, less than a month after Cora joined the company, Mike met with her to discuss the state of affairs. Mike felt that Cora had to be reminded that she no longer was her own boss—she had obligations to the company and needed to focus on these.

The meeting seemed to go well. Cora pointed to a sick mother as the cause of her inattention to corporate issues, explained also that she had commuting problems, but offered to stay late to make up for her late arrivals and came up with a plan to work with an outside firm to catch up on missed deadlines on several projects.

> Mike felt that he had succeeded in putting Cora on a narrow but straight road to success. And he put the problem out of his mind. This was a big mistake, as you will discover later in this book. But let me just say here that coaching is an ongoing responsibility, demanding regular meetings with staff members—regardless of their job performance—to demonstrate that their work is important to the organization.

When is feedback needed? The answer is all the time, not only when errors occur repeatedly in an employee's work or his or her performance doesn't meet expectations. While you should schedule regular coaching sessions with your employees to ensure that work meets—if not exceeds—goals, you want to meet and coach a staff member in particular when his or her work habits disturb you, when progress has been made on a work problem and acknowledgment is in order, when a problem unrelated to the employee's effort surfaces and the individual needs guidance, and when an employee asks you how he or she is doing. The last situation is especially important, since it suggests that you have failed to be clear to the employee about his or her job responsibilities or the quality of his or her work.

The Duties of a Coach

The term *coach* is associated with on-the-job training, but the *role* of coach involves more than training, although that is part of the coach's responsibility. Besides offering training, as coach you are responsible for:

- Acting as a role model for higher performance.
- Hiring the best employees.
- Creating a work culture in which employees have reason to be motivated.
- Clarifying expectations, both micro expectations associated with particular jobs and macro objectives tied to the organization's overall strategy and mission. Within a week of beginning a job, an employee should have met with you to agree on three to five (and no more than five) goals to work toward. Otherwise, the next duty is of little value.
- Providing regular feedback on your employees' behaviors that will put them on the right performance track and keep them there. Understand that this is a two-way communication process. You don't just

give feedback; you also ask for feedback from employees on how they are doing, any problems that have been encountered, and any confusions they have about the priorities that have been set.

•   Applying the performance-evaluation process not only as a measurement tool tied to raises but also as a developmental aid.

•   Providing the training and resources employees need to improve their performance.

•   Praising, praising, and praising some more to reinforce positive performance.

Let's look at these in greater depth.

Acting as a Role Model

Many managers see a coach solely in the sports context—as a Knute Rockne who calls the staff together and gives pep talks. Yes, this is part of being a coach, but there is much more. Certainly a managerial coach should be supportive and nurturing, ready with know-how to help employees succeed in their jobs and with recognition when they do. But managerial coaches, unlike their sports equivalents, perform many of the same tasks as team members from the start of the workday to its end, five days a week, role modeling work behavior for their employees.

You probably remember the expression "Do what I say, not what I do." As a managerial coach, you don't want your staff members to snicker and attribute such a phrase to you. For instance, you can't tell your employees that honesty is important in their reports to you yet you lie to senior management about your department's quarterly results. Or you might talk to your work team about the importance of customer service, inside and outside the organization, yet be known as the manager who never returns customer calls.

One employee told me about her manager who was forever ranting about the need for everyone to be at his or her desks by 9:00 A.M., yet the manager would too frequently stroll into the office after 9:30. She always had a reason, from transportation foul-ups to late nights working at home, and though her reasons might even have been legitimate, over time her behavior belied her words and her message about punctuality became an office joke. So, you have to recognize that when you are in the field (to continue with the sports metaphor), your staff will be watching your plays *and* emulating them. Be sure that they are plays that you would want to see emulated.

One other point: Don't make promises to employees if you don't plan to keep them. Be particularly wary of promises to maintain open and honest communications, to provide each employee with the opportunity to reach his or her potential, the chance for empowerment, and the offer of recognition and reward for excellence and outstanding performance. Your credibility is important to successful coaching, so be sure you can deliver on your promises.

Hiring the Best

Yes, in a sense, coaching begins even before the individual is on staff, as you select those people who have the job skills and experience and, maybe most important of all, the potential to move beyond the current job. In short, you want to hire for your department individuals who fit this profile:

- They are continually in search of more knowledge and are eager to develop new skills.
- They won't accept the current way of doing things. They have their own ideas and challenge existing practices.
- They want to know the whys and wherefores of things. In keeping with their desire to find more efficient or effective ways of doing their work, they won't accept anything without explanation.
- They are restless and dissatisfied if they don't have challenges. If they have finished their own work, they are the employees who offer a helping hand to co-workers or to their boss.

Creating the Right Climate

To be successful in your role as coach, you need to create a climate that reflects a free and open exchange of ideas and is seen as a learning environment. Your goal is to create an energizing atmosphere that stimulates employees' internal motivations to produce. You create such an environment by:

- *Keeping Threats, Even Implied Ones, Out of Your Conversations.* For instance, never say to an employee, "If you, Phil, want to succeed in this job, you had better. . . ." Or, worse, "Debbie, if you want to *keep* your job, you had better. . . ." Such comments are seen as implied or

overt threats, and they will be met with denial, flight, or anger—all responses that can undermine the time and effort you spend training Phil or Debbie to use their full potential.

• *Building Rapport with Your Employees.* I'm not suggesting that you lunch daily with your employees or go for drinks after work. But you should demonstrate a caring attitude toward your employees, a willingness to put aside the stack of papers on your desk to discuss personal problems as well as work-related ones. A manager earns the trust of his or her employees by demonstrating an honest interest in them and fostering open and candid two-way communication. And a wise manager keeps the employees' problems confidential.

• *Developing a Flexible Management Style.* Just as you wouldn't use the same response style for every situation you confront, you should not use the same management style in working with the diverse members of your group. Employees are individuals with individual needs. As a manager, you should treat all your employees fairly but not necessarily the same. For instance, an employee who is new will need more direction than a more experienced employee. Likewise, a five-year veteran in the department who is taking on a new responsibility will need more direction than another five-year veteran who is doing the same work she has been doing for the past five years.

• *Supporting an Employee's Effort.* When you are discussing skill gaps or the need for additional training or other developmental work, you want to come across as a cheerleader, not as an evaluator. You want your remarks to be perceived as helpful feedback rather than as criticism. Keep in mind that the phrase *constructive criticism* is an oxymoron. Provide constructive feedback instead. Keep your remarks upbeat, pointing to both those things your employee has done right and to those things he or she did wrong. And end your comments with a statement that reassures the employee that you have confidence in his or her ability to do the task well or to complete the assignment on schedule or to learn how to use the newest software program.

• *Looking at Mistakes as Learning Opportunities.* You should point to a problem and tell the employee, ''Okay, this isn't working. What can we learn from our approach here?'' The message you send to the employee is that mistakes can be valuable for teaching, thus supporting your learning environment. The employee won't be frightened to test out his or her ideas because the individual will know that you recognize that not

all efforts will be successful—in short, that there is failure associated with risk, but that mistakes do not mean that the risk taker is a failure.

• *Separating the Behavior from the Person.* You want an employee to come away from the coaching with his or her self-esteem intact. Let's say that a member of your team dominates the discussion. In coaching him, you might tell the individual, "You often have good ideas, Sam, but we lose others' ideas when you monopolize the team discussions." Sam will leave the meeting with the feeling that you appreciate his effort but are aware that his behavior needs to be changed and that he should learn to listen as much as talk at staff meetings.

• *Recognizing Improvement.* Just as you don't want to destroy an employee's self-esteem by criticizing some behavior or some work the individual has done, you also want to build up that person's self-esteem. When he or she has made an effort to improve performance, this staff member's self-esteem and further efforts to improve can be encouraged with your acknowledgment of those improvements. Even small improvements should be recognized since this feedback can stimulate the employee to work on greater changes.

• *Building on Strengths and Assets.* You can energize employees by letting them know that you recognize their strengths. It doesn't matter if you know that Carol occasionally is careless, or comes in late, or has a hard time writing proposals. When Carol completes a vendor comparison and comes up with several ways to save the department money, it's important to tell her how much her efforts are appreciated. After this, Carol certainly will be more amenable to discussing her tardiness or carelessness and to taking your instruction on how to put together better proposals.

Clarifying Expectations and Providing Feedback

If there is one situation that can keep your department from attaining high performance, it is confusion among employees about your expectations. You need to be specific not only about the tasks that have to be done and the priorities for assignments but also about the game plan for the team. That game plan is made up of several elements:

• *Department Mission and Operating Goals.* Ideally, these should have been developed with the group. But periodically you should remind the staff about them, perhaps in regular status reports, noting progress toward achieving them.

- *Corporate Strategy and Mission.* If you want to get the most from your employees, you need to let them know as much as possible about the bigger corporate picture. That includes information about the company's financial position. Whether news is good or bad, knowing the situation is better for employees than their speculating about it.

- *Corporate Values.* Your staff should know what initiatives senior management has identified to help the company achieve a competitive advantage. Don't just read the list as written by top management. Discuss with your team how these values translate to behaviors that are part of every member's job. When employees know these values and have a clear idea of their role in the drama at hand, they are better prepared to understand and accept the feedback you give them, even when negative. Here's how to make that feedback valuable:

- *Plan what you will say.* This ensures that you don't allow any personal frustration to creep into your remarks.

- *Be patient.* What may be very simple for you (because you have done this kind of work for many years) may not be so simple to someone doing it for the first time. In time, with your help, an employee may master the job and even find a more efficient way to do the same work.

- *Be specific, not general.* You want the individual to have enough details to be able to make specific changes in behavior. It's not enough, for instance, to tell an employee to "think more globally." Rather, you can suggest that he "stay in touch with co-workers in our European subsidiary—we need to be alert to synergistic opportunities. We missed out on signing a contract with that multinational because we didn't know that our European division had contacts with its British executive director." Or, rather than tell an employee to be "more customer-focused," you should say, "I was disappointed that we haven't done a customer focus group this quarter. If we are to stay abreast of our customers' needs, we need to hold these meetings at least quarterly."

- *Be descriptive, not evaluative.* You should be specific about a situation, not judgmental. Let's assume that one of your staff members did a poor job meeting and greeting some potential clients yesterday. Instead of telling him, "You really messed up yesterday," you should say, "You need to do your homework before clients visit. You didn't know. . . ."

- *Be sensitive to your feelings at the time.* You may destroy the rapport you have built with an employee if you give negative feedback when you are angry. The temptation to relieve your own frustrations by blam-

ing this person may be great, but it's a temptation that you should resist. The short-term satisfaction you achieve doing this could have long-term repercussions as you destroy the relationship between you and this employee.

• *Use words, body language, and tone of voice to show that your intention is to help.* You want your employee to listen to your feedback, even if it is critical of performance. Your communication style will make a difference.

• *Focus on behavior that can be changed.* You will only frustrate your employees by identifying shortfalls over which they have no control. To keep from falling into this trap, never make assumptions about a situation. Begin any discussion about some work undone or finished behind schedule by asking "who," "what," "where," and "how." Note that I haven't suggested that you use "why" questions; they can easily put an individual on the defensive. "Why" questions are best saved for follow-up times, to get more insight after you have a clearer idea of the cause of a situation.

• *Show how the job should be done.* You don't only describe how the work was done wrong; where possible, also show how it should be done. For example, it isn't enough to tell an employee, "You goofed. Try again; maybe next time you'll get it right."

• *Listen to the employee's explanation.* Sometimes you will get an excuse. But there may also be plausible reasons for a problem to exist that you aren't aware of. If so, say, "Thank you."

• *Give your employee some extra time.* You know that you have to give constructive feedback, pointing up those aspects of an individual's work that were especially well done to ensure their repetition, as well as noting faults in a job done. But once you have given the feedback, don't just walk away. Give the employee a little personal time to explain why he did the job as it was done. Wouldn't you want some extra time to explain your reason for approaching work other than the way your boss wants?

Applying the Performance Appraisal as a Developmental Tool

Employee evaluations are perfect opportunities for you to put on your coaching hat and discuss ways in which your employees can improve their work. Many managers forget the developmental side of evaluations.

Good appraisals don't only assess employees' performance; they also identify opportunities for improvement.

Too often at the end of an appraisal year, managers talk only about the rating for the past year and its fiscal consequences. Instead, in your coaching role you should lay the groundwork for next year's performance appraisal; for instance, discuss an employee development plan that addresses the problem areas that kept the individual from achieving his or her outcomes in the past year. And such development plans are as important to your high performers as they are to your average or poor performers. If an employee has consistently exceeded standards and done so for several years, she is probably frustrated by the lack of opportunities for promotion or new challenges. This is the time, then, to discuss training programs that develop skills that could lead to advancement—in other words, to increasing her employability.

The end-of-year meeting isn't the only time you can address these issues. At every quarterly review, you might want to work out development programs with your employees to minimize any shortcomings that are likely to cause them to fall behind in the goals set for the year. In the next chapter, the role of appraisals in coaching will be discussed in greater detail, as one of two ways to add stretch to your employees' performance. The other way involves conducting training assessments. For both, the key is to create development plans for your employees.

Taking on Your Developmental Responsibilities

You help your employees to grow professionally by reviewing their job descriptions in order to define the core competencies of their jobs. With this information, you can then determine if each job holder possesses these competencies or not. A competency is a skill, ability, area of knowledge, set of experiences, or attitude; and it is a manager's responsibility, in his or her role as coach, to determine if members of the team lack any competencies. This assessment is done, first, by breaking down each competency into specific behaviors, then by observing staff members at work to see what they can and cannot do.

The findings then become the basis of developmental plans for staff members. Successful plans focus on no more than two or three areas for development and contain specific time frames for accomplishment. Of course, each skill or area of knowledge should be well defined. Within the plan, too, the means for developing that skill or knowledge area should be spelled out. It makes no sense, for instance, to create a devel-

opment plan for an employee that has her attending night school to become more proficient in some new office technology when there are no funds to pay for the training.

The developmental plan need not involve off-site training. An employee can grow in his or her job with customized assignments, ranging from such simple ones as completing a self-development tape or acting as a buddy to a newcomer to more complex ones like being given a temporary lateral transfer or being asked to attend a conference, to those with great stretch like working with mergers, acquisitions, or new divisions that are growing to improve business results or with a cross-functional group at an offshore location.

Where a development plan calls for you to act as a trainer yourself, you should:

• *Present the big picture.* Your employees know their jobs, but they may not know how they contribute to the bigger corporate picture. Let them know their role's influence on the company's strategic direction if there is one.

• *Provide sufficient time for an employee to develop the new skill.* We all seem to have big workloads. You can't expect your employees to immediately learn new skills or acquire added capabilities overnight, so any training effort should provide enough time for employees to master the new material.

• *Start from where the employee currently is.* Don't overwhelm the employee in providing instruction, but also don't treat him or her as incompetent because of a need for training. Treat the person as a competent human being who has proved to be a successful learner in the past and can absorb this new training as well.

• *Present your instruction in the form of a problem to be solved.* This may actually be the case when the training is designed to fill a knowledge or skill gap. Let's say that you have an employee who does less than well in making a critical presentation to a client. If you don't want the incident to be repeated, you have to meet with the employee, provide constructive feedback about his or her performance, and together decide on how he or she is to perfect the capability, whether it is part of the employee's current job or represents an expansion of responsibilities and potential for advancement.

• *Find a place that is free from interruptions in which to do your training.* Set aside at least an hour, but no more than two hours, because

employees can become too fatigued to absorb instructions over a longer time span.

• *Demonstrate the desired outcome.* The employee has to know why the work is to be done as you instruct. Taking him or her through the process to completion should help make that clear. While the employee may identify over time a more effective or efficient way to do the same work, initially you want your worker to follow your instructions carefully.

When you show someone how to perform a task, the training should approximate the conditions of the job. Use the actual equipment and, ideally, install the equipment in a space similar to that in which it will be located when he or she is working with the equipment. This will make the adjustment to the real thing easier.

• *Plan for follow-up.* As a part of your one-on-one training, you should come back several times to ensure that the individual is completing the task as you have instructed. In particular, you need to look out for shortcuts that may slip into the work and that could lead to quality problems or, worse, raise safety problems. For instance, in one plant, workers found that removing a safety shield on a die cutter increased productivity. Unfortunately, it also increased the likelihood of an employee's being severely injured. When supervisor Dick explained to his new hire how to use the machine, it never occurred to him to explain why there was a shield in place. So it was very fortunate that he followed up about an hour later. He found that Jim had removed the shield. Worse, the removal was a suggestion from another worker. The incident became the basis of a group coaching meeting to teach the staff safer operation of the plant's equipment.

• *Provide support.* Sometimes a buddy can be assigned to someone learning a new skill, provided you have tested the buddy to be sure that he or she knows how to complete the task correctly. But in addition to assigning a buddy, you might want to leave the trainee with written instructions. Type the instructions double-spaced or with large margins; give the trainee the sheet during training, and allow him or her to make notes in the margins.

Praising as a Means of Reinforcing Good Performance

Praise is included separately on the list of coaching duties to indicate its importance as well as to differentiate it from feedback. Feedback may be part of praise, but it also points to those aspects of an employee's work that were not done well, suggesting how future jobs should be handled.

Praise, on the other hand, is designed primarily to recognize an employee's outstanding performance and to motivate him or her to repeat such performance.

The problem with praise is that it is very rarely given. Most managers seem more inclined to give criticism than praise. One manager even told me, "I don't have the time to give praise." I know that this manager is extremely busy, but the employee deserved the praise and sought some confirmation that his extra effort was recognized. Because the praise was not forthcoming, to this day that employee goes out of his way to tell others on staff how much he dislikes his boss. Worse, he has gone from being a better-than-average employee to being a screw-up, which many co-workers believe is an effort to get his supervisor's attention. He seems to maintain an internal auditing system, and his calculations show that the boss still owes him one.

Marta: When "Praise" Lowers Morale

There is praise and then there is praise. Marta is well aware of the value of praise and would argue that she praises her employees, but she has yet to learn how to use praise effectively. Or, for that matter, what is good praise and what is bad praise. Let me share with you some typical situations in which Marta offered praise to staff members.

First, there was the time when Tim, one of her staff members, completed a research study a few days ahead of schedule. He had worked late several nights to get the report done and ready for her final review before she submitted it to the product manager. As he proudly presented it to Marta, she told him, "I'm so pleased that you completed the report a few days before it is due. Now I'll have some extra time to read it and check to be sure you haven't forgotten to include any critical information." Tim left wondering why he had put in the extra effort to complete the task ahead of time. Marta had used the occasion only to rub salt into wounds caused by earlier criticism of Tim's past reports.

Second, let's take the time that Harry's marketing campaign brought in 10 percent more sales than projected. Marta announced this fact to her staff at its Monday morning action meeting. Everyone was delighted when Marta announced that she had even bought doughnuts and would be providing coffee for all to celebrate the occasion. The staff shared in Harry's success and there were lots of compliments, but the group's enthusiasm quickly waned when Marta casually remarked to a staff member, "Harry's fortunate that he made those numbers.

His other campaigns haven't been as successful.'' She wondered why the party atmosphere suddenly died, but the reason clearly showed on Harry's face.

Third, Marta would be at a meeting and react enthusiastically to suggestions from staff members. The problem is that her responses were so ambiguous that the group had no clear idea what it was that Marta was so pleased about so that they could work beyond that. There were comments like, ''Interesting remark,'' ''Good,'' or ''OK.'' Because Marta never elaborated, the puzzled group spent much time talking at these meetings and little time thereafter following through on the ''Good'' thoughts or ''OK'' suggestions.

But the worst example was the phony praise that often came from Marta. The staff knew that each day Marta would stop by her administrative assistant's desk to compliment the woman on her latest outfit. The phoniness of the daily remark was evident in her intonation and the minimum attention she gave the woman as she passed her cubicle on the way to her own office.

What, then, is good praise? It is sincere, concise, and specific. And it is delivered in a manner that communicates enthusiasm for the work done or appreciation of the extra effort expended by the employee. For example, ''Jim, you really helped us achieve our goal on time by working last weekend.'' This compliment points up the importance of the employee's activity and, better yet, his contribution to the department's goal or mission. Whether by inflection or intonation, be sure there is no hidden message in good praise—for example, that Jim should have spent his weekend on the task or that you think that Jim had to work over the weekend because he goofs off most workdays.

As coach, you want your praise to encourage further efforts—in the same way as the climate you create in the department is positive and supports increased performance, or that your feedback is constructive and communicates your faith in employees' ability to learn new skills or realize their goals or meet the standards, or that you make the appraisal process a means of adding stretch to the goals your employees work to attain.

Your employees are your most appreciable asset. In the next chapter, you'll learn how to uncover that potential we all talk about our employees having but that they so seldom realize.