

Building a Coaching  
Culture Through  
**EMPOWERMENT  
AND  
LEADERSHIP**

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# One of the keys to business success involves energizing your workforce with a coaching culture.

To do this, a company must build a management team that empowers employees with opportunities to learn. Embracing a “people passionate” business philosophy encourages the growth of both your employees and your business. It certainly has for mine.

I founded our company more than 20 years ago with the intention of refining the staffing industry, and our applicant-centric trademark was a result of our humanized approach.

Coaching plays a prominent role in our organization and is a major factor in how our leadership helps guide junior staff up the ranks. Many of the ideas I share here are those I have put into practice in my own company, a talent management firm in which junior staffers are encouraged to learn from their more experienced colleagues.

Effective coaching begins with the realization that it is a form of investing in workers—specifically, investing in their future. It is a process designed to help them grow and develop as employees and future leaders, so that they, in turn, can grow and develop the company in which they are being coached to play a part.

They should understand from the outset that professional challenges are a form of opportunity. We say “pivot, adapt,

succeed!” This is our leadership approach and the way we build collaborative partnerships with employees, candidates, and clients.

In this growth process, workers are encouraged not only to learn from their superiors but also to provide feedback on every substantive challenge faced by the company: how it gets to where it wants to go, and how it gets to the next level. Questioning and understanding—listening with empathy and rephrasing to confirm understanding—go a long way toward forming a coaching culture.

If this sounds like a form of empowerment, it is. Keeping the human value of employees in mind is a must for leadership. Coaching is a long-term partnership, not just a one-way teaching experience. The ultimate aim of coaching is to derive solutions, so merely dictating strategy is not the way to go.

Every journey that a company embarks on must be accompanied by the knowledge that the path may change, and all must learn to adapt together to the challenges that are encountered along the way. As such, effective coaching entails inspiring others to be a part of what leadership is working on, rather than merely dictating what they should do. Yet at the same time, being firm but polite—a combination I call “grit and grace”—is ideal.



## FOCUSING ON POSITIVES LEADS TO BETTER RESULTS

In addition to directing positive energy and maintaining a positive attitude toward those being coached, coaches must listen to their concerns and embrace their strengths and creativity whenever possible. For instance, many of us are aware of the “strengths and weaknesses” sections of employee reviews. One thing that we have found helpful in our coaching culture is to focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. Even if the strengths are not 100% relevant to the job at hand, encouraging an individual’s unique talents can result in enhanced motivation, engagement, and overall performance.

Focusing on strengths doesn’t mean that we ignore our weaknesses or don’t try to mitigate them. It means we encourage our staff to use their differing individual strengths to achieve the same outcomes of success. For example, one person’s approach to sales—say, someone who loves winning people over in a personal way—will be very different from the approach of a much more analytical employee. It is important to recognize and value the individual’s strengths and the things that make each person unique. Focusing on their weaknesses rarely leads to better results.

Leading by example is key to successful coaching. It is vital to inspire those being coached not by dictating tasks but rather by demonstrating through one’s own actions. This idea extends to everything—including cleaning up around the office! Employees whose main job is outside the task at hand should still have their voices heard and ideas implemented.

(Indeed, this occurred at my company when we recently moved into new offices and my assistant had great ideas about adapting existing building structures into our décor.)

## YOU GOT THIS—YES YOU DO!

One thing I often say to my staff is, “You got this!” This is a phrase that I have learned to use as liberally as possible, as I have found it boosts morale and illustrates the level of trust that I and our senior staff have in those who are being coached.

This scenario often happens with less senior account managers and staff. They are often afraid to take responsibility for business decisions, such as contract negotiations, or to say no to a request without asking for approval. But when they come to me for an answer, the one I often give is, “You got this.” It really does empower them to feel confident in making these decisions without having to second-guess themselves or always seek approval. It also builds a lot of trust within the organization.

I also use this approach with senior staff. They have a lot on their plates and can often feel overloaded. It may sound basic, but everyone needs reassurance sometimes, and a simple “You got this!” offers that. Sometimes I even say it to myself!

## KEY ASPECTS OF A COACHING CULTURE

Let’s look in a bit more detail at three aspects of a coaching culture.



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“Remember that coaching is used to enhance job satisfaction, team and individual productivity, and even team morale.”



**Use positive role models and mentoring.** These approaches are crucial to inspiring and developing the next generation of leaders. To understand why and how, it is first important to note that in traditional terms, coaching and mentoring differ in their aims and goals. One notable aspect of this difference is that mentors usually offer lots of advice while a coach helps you come to the answers to questions or a solution to an issue on your own. However, internally and in a corporate setting, there is much more overlap between the two.

I need to look no further than my own company for an illustration of this. In my firm, new hires are paired with a mentor on their team—someone who is not their manager but can serve as a touchpoint or a go-to for any questions they may have. The new hire also may shadow his or her mentor to see firsthand how things are done. This relationship is sincerely appreciated by both parties, and people who have been mentored are also more likely to mentor others when given the chance.

**Implement a formal coaching program.** Don't rely on ad hoc, informal methods of coaching to be effective in training your employees. A formal coaching program can easily be set up within an organization, although the exact method by which it is set up and maintained will depend on the type of coaching that is being provided by your company.

**Establish a mentorship program.** Generally speaking, a mentorship program would best be managed within individual teams and administered by the team manager, but with some formal process that is unified firmwide and across all teams. If, however, a company is offering a different type of coaching, it is best to have someone on your staff certified in a methodology.

In my company, we have used popular personal assessment coaching with several teams. It is a versatile method that has great applications at both the individual and team levels, so employees can really get the most out of it. While someone with a background in learning and development will be in charge of administering the coaching, the most important thing is that it be managed by someone who is really passionate about it. Training certainly helps in this process, but we also look for people who are passionate, care about coaching, and share our firm's core belief that a successful

business is based on the success and growth of its own employees.

## THE WAY FORWARD IS POSITIVE

What is a typical “day in the life” like for a coach and junior employee working together? The answer to this question depends on the type of coaching and/or mentoring that is being offered. But whether the emphasis is on coaching or mentoring, it is important to lead with the positive and focus on this, rather than on what is not working, to produce the desired outcome.

If something needs to be corrected, it should be done in a way that does not undermine the employee. Some part of whatever initiative he was responsible for was probably done correctly, so it can be best to start with a focus on that positive. The key here is to provide an open and safe place for the junior employee to ask questions or come to a coach/mentor with a problem without the fear of judgment.

## BENCHMARKS FOR SUCCESS

What should the benchmarks be for the success of the program? Remember that coaching is used to enhance job satisfaction, team and individual productivity, and even team morale. If your firm conducts employee satisfaction surveys, these should offer a good indication of its success. If you don't offer them, I believe it is a good idea to institute them, even if you don't have a coaching program in place. They are simple to implement. Your employees will let you know if they find it beneficial or not. Team managers should also be able to offer great feedback on how their team is running as a result.

Attention to these considerations can result in a healthy coaching culture in your company. The personal and professional growth of your up-and-coming employees may depend on it—as well as the health of your organization overall. [AQ](#)

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