

Coaching for Organizational Performance Effectiveness

Introduction

Training is a proven, accepted intervention for helping organizations develop their workforces and implement changes. In comparison, coaching, an outgrowth from professional sports where it has yielded impressive results, is relatively new in the corporate world and still evolving in practice. This paper explores how coaching used in conjunction with targeted training solutions can further increase the performance effectiveness of an organization.

The Traditional Training Approach

Over the last 25 years, companies have invested heavily in training for their employees as a familiar and predictable approach (Logan, 2004, p.8-9). In competitive, time-pressured corporations, training is often focused on new systems and the skills needed to use them in the interest of helping the organization perform more effectively. Once a majority of employees are performing the new skills, companies are on to the next initiative.

An example of a typical performance improvement project is one with a very tight timeframe for implementing a new system. The solution is designed around the basic functions an average employee needs to perform using a new computer system to keep the business running. Training for the new system is often developed concurrently along with the technology, effectively eliminating more creative instructional design strategies that take more time to create. Web-based training often comprises all or the majority of the curriculum due to its ease of

accessibility for employees. Resistance to change is common and companies sometimes keep two systems running simultaneously until everyone is committed to the new one. Once the system is launched, there are usually no or limited resources remaining due to the system modifications and subsequent adjustments in the training program that occurred along the way. Any additional effort is spent revising the web-based training and computer system.

Despite its challenges, the approach described does work for the majority employees who only need to learn different skills to keep performing in the organization. For companies desiring to become world-class, however, a more individualized approach is needed especially for exemplary performers who are capable of doing more (Logan).

Coaching Techniques Translate from Sports to Business

In athletics, we are very aware of the direct correlation between superior, individual coaching and world-class performance. The best coaches can motivate poor performers to victory. The timeless, but true sports story is one of a team that has potential; but lacks vision, focus or motivation to perform at peak levels. Then the team finds itself with a coach who holds high expectations for the team, inspires confidence and moves the players into action to be winners (Chubb, 2002). According to Don Shula, the winningest coach in National Football League history, a key to this transformation is enabling the team to function as more than the sum of its parts (Blanchard, 2001, p.39). Rick Pitino,

basketball coach and motivational speaker, describes how the same principles he used with his championship teams can also be applied in other areas of life. Pitino's former players confirm that once they had "survived success" in sports, they were able to apply his lessons to business as well. His steps have many commonalities with solid coaching principles: build self esteem, set demanding goals, always be positive, establish good habits, master the art of communication, learn from role models, thrive on pressure, be ferociously persistent, learn from adversity and survive success (Pitino 1997).

Of course, one of the most appealing aspects of sports is the potential to experience indisputable levels of greatness, like a winning a championship. This is often an elusive goal for a business team or individual, but still worth pursuing, because as Blanchard asks, "Given the amount of time you spend at work, would you rather spend the time being magnificent or ordinary?" (Blanchard, 2001, p.41). For already great individual athletes, ordinary will not do. Professional golfer, Phil Mickelson, switched coaches while ranked third in the world and after winning a tournament to reach even higher levels of performance (Shapiro, 2007). It seems worth wondering what results could be obtained if corporate employees pursued excellence with as much zeal.

While coaching techniques similar to those used in sports can also unlock the potential of employees, managers, executives and organizations, in many ways, this is a greater feat to accomplish due to the constant demands and duration of

a business or career. In other words, the professional does not have an off-season and the business can last a person's entire lifetime. Given such conditions, in order to sustain high performance as a professional, one has to manage energy to experience constant renewal (Loehr, 2005).

Training and Coaching: A Winning Combination

Coaching offers significant promise for addressing the gaps experienced during the typical training project outlined earlier. In particular, coaching is suited for focusing on the common element in every project that an organization undertakes – the people. Done correctly, coaching takes on a very personal approach for each individual as the underlying beliefs that lead to behavior are explored. This nicely supplements the training program which is designed around a representative of the target population. Coaching performed in this way by well-qualified professionals who do not share responsibility for the business metrics has been shown to have a tangible return on investment. The authentic person to person interaction that coaching employs provides another level of support that is often missing or drastically reduced in the corporate environment due to time constraints. Even if internal staff members are able to utilize their coaching skills, the benefits of them are often reduced due to the partiality of the coach (Krakoff, 2002). Lastly, coaching can transform resistance to change into creativity energy that can help people realize more positive, productive lives. If left unresolved, this fear of change tends to resurface in subsequent

organizational endeavors. If addressed, however, this level of thinking can be reversed and turned into a mind shift that leads to innovation (Smith, 2007).

Organizations today rely primarily on teams for implementation of initiatives and innovation of products. This business dynamic has produced a climate where exemplary performance has little to do with cognitive strengths and technical ability. Instead a combination of emotional intelligence competencies, energy management and creativity are of considerable more value (Krakoff, 2002), (Loehr, 2005), (Smith, 2007).

In one study of emotional intelligence competencies for a global division of Siemens, four abilities distinguished managers as star leaders, those whose growth in revenues and return on sales put their performance in the top 10 to 15 percent:

1. Drive to achieve results
2. Ability to take initiative
3. Skills in collaboration and teamwork
4. Ability to lead teams

A pool of managers then was trained to cultivate these competencies. They became familiar with and were evaluated on each ability, and then they set goals for improving them. This resulted in double the profit of a comparison group who had no training. While training directed at emotional intelligence concepts made a measurable impact in this instance, many programs focus only on personality

characteristics and stop short of considering how an individual handles emotions. Because masterful coaching works in the domain of emotions, it is clearly a tool that can further support organizations seeking to shift thinking to new levels. This is demonstrated in a study in a public sector municipal agency where thirty-one managers underwent a conventional managerial training program, followed by eight weeks of one-on-one executive coaching. Training on goal setting, collaborative problem solving, practice, feedback, supervisory involvement, evaluation of end-results, and a public presentation increased productivity by 22.4%, while training and coaching increased productivity by 88% (Krakoff, 2002).

Another area where organizations can benefit from coaching as they strive to increase workforce performance is in the management of energy. A body of work shows that the long tried method of time management does not work because time is a limited resource. In contrast, personal energy is renewable. Again, this revelation comes from the world of professional sports where athletes focus on expanding, sustaining and renewing the energy they need to compete for very short, intense time periods. The key to effectively managing energy under high-pressure situations is becoming fully engaged in the activity. This same technique has been used successfully by professional workers and involves principles that fit well with the coaching model:

1. Draw on the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual sources of personal energy

2. Balance energy expenditure and renewal
3. Push beyond normal limits through personal challenges
4. Establish positive routines or structures

Making these kinds of enduring personal changes can lead to profound opportunities for growth, but also presents a potentially overwhelming challenge for many. A coach during this phase is invaluable in helping: define purpose in the face of long standing habits, finding truth in accordance with personal values and providing accountability for actions.

Perhaps, the most remarkable benefit of making continuous personal improvements is that the required mind shifts to realize new levels of thinking directly correlate to more innovation. Breakthrough thinking is of great interest to organizations today where the general wisdom is “Innovate or die”. Like emotional intelligence, creativity has been attributed to certain personality characteristics and it can be tempting for companies to assemble teams of people with these traits and rely on only them for ideas. This approach fails to tap into the majority of the workforce, however, when the truth is that every individual possesses creativity. In 1997, the Schools for Innovators sponsored by several corporations who were interested in finding ways to expand their thinking led to the 7 Levels of Change model. This approach for driving creativity is a very action oriented one that incorporates personal change and coaching throughout the process. The levels of thinking from least to most creative are: 1)

effectiveness, 2) efficiency, 3) improving, 4) cutting, 5) copying, 6) different and 7) impossible. Every step is focused on results, describes shifts in perspective, and includes tools and techniques to put people in action to support the change. The progression is from an adaptive creative style that focuses on the first three levels to an innovator who thinks at the last four levels. This work correlates personality traits with levels of creativity. This allows personality and creativity assessments to be used to help individuals explore their approach to change. Once teams understand these relationships, they can more appropriately assign roles to members who are naturally comfortable performing in certain capacities. For example, only 15% of the population has Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator preferences of Extroverted-Intuitive (EN). People with these characteristics tend to be innovators capable of big change and most easily assume the task of creating global changes in technology. Alternatively, people can work on becoming more comfortable with change by practicing more creative actions (Amabile, 1998) (Rolf, 2007).

The shift from habitual patterns to more creativity and innovation is an experiential one, as evidenced by Rolf's School and Thinking Expeditions, and coaching as a key support in the transformation. Coaching can be essential in assisting people progress through this type of learning for several reasons. First, ingrained habits must be disrupted to practice new behaviors and this is difficult to do for one's self. This is one reason off-site workshops away from familiar environments are so effective. Of course, the challenge then becomes applying

new knowledge upon re-entering an organization still operating according to old paradigms. A coach can provide continuous, personal support and a lifeline to a person in an organization undergoing change. Second, it is difficult to achieve a profound shift in perspective without an external event as a catalyst. A coach can serve to continuously disrupt underlying beliefs and share different perspectives to increase the possibility of breaking free from ordinary thinking.

Conclusion

In summary, coaching has proven to be of significant personal value to those desiring change and has also resulted in notable returns on investment. Currently, the amount of investment required for coaching by organizations is mostly reserved for executives, upper-level managers and high-potential employees. Studies have shown that when these groups received coaching following training programs profit and productivity increased even more than with training alone. These situations involved instruction on emotional intelligence competencies and interpersonal skills which are considerably more valuable than technical knowledge. Therefore, opportunities for expanding the use of coaching following training seem to lie in two areas. One is to make coaching available to key groups in the workforce undergoing change, not just leadership. The second is to focus the coaching on energy management which involves drawing on emotional sources and change management as it relates to creativity. These areas hold the most promise for more effective performance and increased innovation, respectively, both of which are highly desired by businesses.

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