

Coaching for Improvement

Often the most valuable workers are the ones most ignored. These workers are the many that simply come to work almost every day and do their job. As a general rule, they are not super-stars but are not “problem workers.” They want to do a good job and give the organization their best. They would likely welcome help in performing their jobs better if the help is presented in a positive, constructive way. These workers appreciate a supervisor who shows them genuine respect and care, and the most effective way to do this is to provide coaching. Here are a few tips to help you be most effective in your coaching meetings:

- Start most coaching sessions by asking the worker how he/she feels about the job. Ask them about their ideas. When they respond, listen and ask more questions. Try not to be quick to dismiss any idea or concern. Asking more questions in an accepting way is the start of respectful communication.
- Having regularly scheduled individual sessions is important and demonstrates your concern. These sessions can be weekly, bi-weekly or monthly as appropriate. If they must be rescheduled, make sure they do take place and are not put on the “back burner.” The goal of the coaching sessions should be to increase skill and modify behavior, not transform personality. Give the worker specific measurable goals. Let them know how you will measure and follow up with them.
- Recognize that each worker is an individual who brings different strengths to the table. Joe may never be as fast as Mary, but he may be able to add a different value, such as organization of the work. Look for opportunities to help workers win in different ways. People will be able to hear more objectively about their opportunities to improve if they have heard lots of sincere praise.
- Ignoring poor performance will not ever make it go away. Openly discuss the goals that are not being met. Keep perspective. If the performance is acceptable, but short of the improvement goal, recognize the progress that is being made. Ask enough questions to make sure you and the worker have the same understanding of the expectations and method. Communication is so important. Problems often come from misunderstandings between the worker and the supervisor.
- Praise, praise, praise good performance. Insure that both praise and correction are about performance and not personal characteristics. It’s obvious that saying, “I need you to reduce your errors by 50%” will be much more effective at improving performance than saying, “Some days you seem so careless and sloppy.” In the first example, you are expressing a need you have for improved performance. In the second case, you are attacking the worker.

Performance improvement requires time and effort. The longer a performance problem exists, the more time and effort will be required to see a change. When workers and supervisors communicate effectively and understand that performance improvement is a normal exercise of any healthy workplace, the prognosis for success is good. First Sun organizational consultants are available to assist with this and many other subjects that could affect your workplace. Just give us a call, toll free **800-968-8143** or in Greater Columbia **803-376-2668**.

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