Creating an evidence-based coaching culture

Coaching means different things to different people and can vary in its effectiveness depending on the methods and strategies used. How can you be intentional in creating a coaching culture to ensure a maximum level of success? How can you incorporate objective data into the coaching process to increase impact?

The benefits of investing and developing a coaching culture are great. According to a survey conducted by the Institute of Leadership and Management, 95% of respondents experienced direct benefits to the organization, and 96% experienced benefits to the individual. A wide range of specifically cited improvements included: communication and interpersonal skills, leadership and management, conflict resolution, personal confidence, attitudes and motivation, management performance, as well as preparation for a new role or promotion.

So, how do you create this type of high-performance coaching culture in your organization?

1. *Define "coaching."* Coaching isn't telling people what to do differently. Unfortunately, many organizations still perceive coaching as a tool for correcting poor performance. However, good coaching is about achieving a high-performance culture, not managing a low-performance one. Coaching is a cooperative, interactive process of working together on improved performance and leadership development. You also need to define what a "coaching culture" means. A coaching culture involves regular feedback and communication from the manager to COACH the employee to sustain, improve, or modify behaviors and skills.

2. *Develop a Shared Vision for the Coaching Culture*. Once a coaching culture is in place, Senior Management needs to define what results can be achieved, what will people feel, and ultimately how coaching will influence positive behavior changes with an observable and measurable impact on the business. One example of a coaching culture vision is: "To create an environment that elevates individual and team performance by integrating coaching techniques and principles into the organization; and aligns coaching with the business strategy by educating and engaging leaders in the coaching process."

3. *Get Senior Management Buy-in and Participation*. Without support from the top, the change to a coaching culture is doomed to fail before it begins. Once you identify an executive level sponsor(s), you need to create measurements for change. To create a sustainable environment for a coaching culture to thrive means fully integrating coaching into strategic HR processes and systems and communicating progress on a regular basis. Also, Senior Managers need to receive coaching to truly understand the power of coaching and to fully support it. However, it should not be limited to Senior Executives. While the focus of coaching may vary, all levels of employees, definitely all managers and leaders in an organization, can and should benefit from coaching.

4. *Integrate Measurement Tools*. Various types of measurement tools can play an invaluable role in several facets of the coaching process. For example, 360-degree feedback tools can provide essential information at both the "micro" and "macro" level. At the "micro," or individual level, the information gleaned from a 360 can form the basis of the coaching strategy and individual development plan. It can answer questions like:
   - "Is this leader's self-perception in line with what is being experienced by those he or she works with?"
   - "Are this leader and their boss in alignment regarding focus and priorities for this person's job?"
   - "What specific behaviors are contributing to the perception that a particular competency is an area for development?
   - "And, after coaching has occurred, "Is progress being made?"

If 360-degree feedback is gathered on multiple managers in the organization, the data can be looked at in aggregate to answer important "macro" level questions, such as "are their certain developmental needs that appear to be systemic in the organization?" "Do our leaders' strengths align with our organizational culture, priorities, and unique selling proposition?" Other types of assessment tools can also shed light on whether individuals are optimally placed within the organization in roles where they are able to best leverage their strengths.

Coaching should not be a siloed initiative. The greatest impact can be achieved when organizations connect coaching to the strategic plan. This requires a commitment to the initiative for a minimum of two to three years. Return on Investment measures also need to be agreed upon by Senior Management. These measures must be relevant to the organization, connected to business strategy, and able to be tracked effectively.

For those organizations willing to embark on the journey, the impact on business can be tremendous, dramatically impacting your culture and your people for the better. It's amazing what individuals can achieve with the right level of support and development. When coaching is successfully integrated into the culture of an organization, it creates a competitive advantage and unlocks untapped talent and potential.

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