Coaching Culture
More Leaders Coaching More Often

by Alan Fine

My fascination with performance improvement has put me face-to-face with people from many walks of life, all trying to find their best selves. Often, when people want to close the gap between current performance and desired performance they turn to a coach. Done well, coaching can change lives and deliver peak performance. More organizations are embracing coaching as a performance management solution. One study showed that training alone increased productivity by 22.4 percent, while training plus coaching increased productivity by 88 percent. However, organizations get stuck when creating a culture of coaching, and making coaching count where it matters most. What can be done about it?

Clearly, coaching has a big impact on performance. Yet, many internal coaching programs falter, and thus organizations are not reaping the full benefits of more leaders, coaching more often, for more business impact. Why? Because leaders lack an easy process for coaching, can’t easily identify coaching opportunities, and aren’t recognized, held accountable, and rewarded for coaching.

Why aren’t more leaders coaching? The answer is simple—changing cultural behaviors is always a challenge.

Take Three Quick Steps

In building a coaching culture there are three critical elements that cause coaching programs to stick:

1. Provide a simple coaching process for leaders. Coaching conversations can be difficult, especially when emotions are involved. Having a simple coaching process (conversation map) to follow can simplify the world of a leader and accelerate the performance of individual contributors and the entire team. A coaching process must be simple enough to use often, and when under pressure. It should also enable people to use or organize their knowledge and skills. To gain leader buy-in and organizational adoption, any coaching process must be easy to use, highly transferable, and make a noticeable impact.

2. Spot the everyday opportunities. Coaching is an ongoing conversation that helps people get from where they are to where they want to go. These conversations boost the speed and accuracy of decisions (Decision Velocity™), which leads to actions that generate the desired results. Chances to improve Decision Velocity are everywhere. Some decisions are large enough to be recognized easily as coaching opportunities, like devising a 3-year strategy. But, others are small and subtle enough that we don’t see them as decision points, like how to frame a conversation with a co-worker or how to respond to an email. Each decision point

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By recognizing coaching moments, managers and leaders can consistently tap into the power of coaching and use their coaching skills. Every change in results starts with an individual or group decision. And every decision point is a chance to apply coaching to increase the decision velocity—to make the decision faster and more accurately.

How can leaders spot coaching opportunities? Ask three questions: 1) Is there a gap between the present state and the desired state? 2) Is there a problem or issue that needs to be solved? and 3) Does the person (coachee) seem stuck or paralyzed by the gap, problem, or issue? Helping leaders uncover coaching opportunities gets more leaders coaching more often—a key for building a coaching culture.

3. Make coaching visible. Since coaching can have a big impact on performance, you need to track, measure, reward, and reinforce coaching behaviors. Asking managers to answer four questions helps them focus on what’s important: How much are you coaching? What are you coaching on (is it what’s most important)? Is it having an impact? What are your insights and learning? Asking managers to report regularly on these questions facilitates bottom-up engagement and top-down reinforcement. Managers expect that they will be asked about their coaching activity, and their bosses, having access to that information, can support, troubleshoot, and respond. Coaching can help people do more right things, fewer wrong things, and just do things differently. So, to get more leaders, coaching more often, for more impact, create visibility into what’s happening so you can coach to their coaching behavior.

Developing a coaching culture can be challenging, but the benefits are clear. LE