

## CHAPTER

# 2

## Coaching as an Ongoing Responsibility

MANAGERS, SUPERVISORS, AND TEAM LEADERS know that people are their most appreciable asset. In coaching your employees or team members, your intent is to increase the worth of your organization's human capital. As a good coach, you are a watcher, using your observational skills to determine the gap between employee performance and potential and to close that gap by developing your employees' full capability. After all, you know that as these gaps are closed and your employees fully develop their abilities, they could assume some of your responsibilities, freeing you to work on more visionary projects. In today's lean organizations, managers who don't look for and coach their employees to their fullest capability will have a problem, too. Compare the coaching performance of Steve with that of Sid.

### **STEVE AND SID: COACHING FROM FEAR VS. COACHING FOR EXCELLENCE**

Plenty of talented employees have worked on Steve's team, but he doesn't really want to coach them beyond their ability to do their current jobs well. Why? He's afraid that if he adds stretch to their jobs they might in time want his position—and possibly get it. Consequently, all his bright, promising employees have either moved on to greener pastures or are in search of them. When Steve is away on business or vacation or out ill, his crew's productivity suffers because there's no one able to give direction. Steve frequently complains that he has been in the same position for ten years, but actually he is fortunate that he

wasn't laid off during the last downsizing. Senior management had wanted to keep only those managers who get high performance from their crews. And Steve is not one of these.

The company's executives want managers like Sid, who is constantly developing his crew members and runs the top crew in the organization. Sid believes that when he has high performance expectations of his employees and communicates these, his crew will work to meet them. Yes, Sid's department has a problem keeping workers, but for only the best of reasons. As his employees have demonstrated their capability, they have moved on to head up crews of their own or to take on special projects or to assume higher positions within other departments. Does Sid mind? Their departure has caused short-term problems, but he has enjoyed seeing the individuals he has helped develop become recognized formally. Besides, as these crew members have grown, so has Sid's worth to the company.

### **How Sid Encourages Stretch**

Sid doesn't just start with good employees. He helps develop his stars by:

- Conducting training-needs assessments as soon as his employees come on board. He carefully reviews résumés and meets the first day with new hires to identify gaps in information and knowledge, holes that he immediately fills to ensure that newcomers pull their weight as quickly as possible.
- Incorporating developmental planning in his quarterly and annual performance appraisals, adding stretch, but stretch within reach of his crew members.
- Communicating his belief in his employees' abilities.

Let's see how Sid makes his employees, like Brad, for example, believe they can do much more than they thought they could. When Brad first came aboard, he seldom spoke at team meetings, lacking confidence in his ideas. It was clear to Sid that Brad had tremendous technical ability but wasn't comfortable speaking in public. Sid worked with Brad from the outset to encourage him to share his insights with the group. He met with Brad privately and discussed Brad's ideas with him, noting how valuable they could be to the group as a whole.

Sid also found opportunities for Brad to demonstrate his creativity to himself so he would feel secure enough to prove it to his co-workers. At first, the pace of discussion during Sid's crew's weekly meetings was too fast for Brad. So Sid slowed the pace enough to give Brad the time to articulate his ideas. Eventually, the group would learn to slow itself

down to hear Brad out. Sid also found other teams in the plant in which Brad could make a major contribution but where the pace was slower so that Brad would not be intimidated when speaking out.

With Sid's encouragement and support, Brad's confidence increased until he assumed his fair share of the brainstorming in the department's problem-solving meetings.

As a coach, you can motivate, inspire, and encourage your fast-trackers, but you must also build the confidence of your more timid talents—people like Brad. Your efforts will be repaid time and time again as these individuals use their newly discovered and nurtured talents to become new team superstars.

## How to Start

The process begins even before one of your employees comes on board, as you sit with potential candidates for a job opening. As you interview the applicants, you will note gaps in knowledge or experience. The individual you ultimately hire may even lack experience in some aspect of the work or be unfamiliar with your own organization's work processes or procedures.

As a coach, your first task in shortening the learning curve for the new staff member, and ultimately building a staff of superstars, is not to get so preoccupied with your own work as to forget the need to fill these learning gaps when your new hire finally arrives. Besides introducing the new recruit to his or her co-workers or getting the individual started on his or her first assignment, you need to sit down with your new hire to review the job description and any concerns you might have about the individual's ability to handle the work. Your goal is to discuss openly and honestly your assessment of the individual's training needs. Together, you and your new employee need to develop the first of what will be several development plans during the individual's time in your department.

## Bringing New Employees Up to Speed

Some of the new hire's deficiencies may be handled by assigning a buddy; other skill gaps may require enrollment in a training program or a course at a community college; still others may take something as simple as

giving the employee your company's procedures manual and asking him or her to read it carefully. If the latter is your action, however, then you will want to meet with the employee after a week or so to ensure that the individual has indeed become familiar with all the procedures and understands not only the work procedures but the reasons for them.

### **Assessing Training Needs**

What about employees who are already on staff and perhaps have been with you for some time? Take a pencil and paper and draw up a list of all your employees. Which ones lack some skill that would make the difference between their being a mediocre or average performer and a super-performer? Which ones have potential ability that has not been developed because their current jobs don't call for using those strengths? (As you look over your list, you may also identify one or two employees who have performance problems that, in your opinion, require more than training. These persons may need counseling if they are failing to meet job standards because of their attitudes or a personal problem. For help with them, see Section II of this book.)

Once you have identified those staff members who could perform at higher levels with more training, your next step is to meet with each one to discuss your conclusions. Don't wait until the next round of quarterly performance reviews. As quickly as possible, schedule one-on-one meetings with those individuals you believe have the potential to do more. Keep in mind that time lost is productivity lost.

Some employees will welcome the opportunity to discuss their training needs, particularly if they see additional training as a means of increasing their employability. Others will be concerned that your assessment threatens their job security. In discussing your observations with this latter group, you can tell them that the assessment was designed to alert you to the competencies—the skills, abilities, and knowledge—all your employees need. Your intent is not to find fault but to identify opportunities to improve each staff member's performance.

#### **JUAN: HOW TRAINING CAN BRING UNEXPECTED BENEFITS**

This is how Juan handled Lucy's response to his assessment that she needed to become more adept at using the company's customer database. During his visits to the work area, he had seen that Lucy often asked Blanche for help in choosing mailing lists for her product mail-

ings. Sales were good, but Juan knew that Lucy was one of his best market managers, as familiar with her product line's customers as the product manager. Consequently, Juan couldn't help but believe that if Lucy had a better working knowledge of the database, then sales would be much, much higher.

He wanted her to work with Bruce to learn how the database could be used more to target product customers. Bruce, a veteran with the company, had worked with the outside consultant to design the system and consequently knew its ins and outs better than any other marketing manager. Lucy knew how to use the database to market her products well, but she wasn't familiar enough with it to apply her knowledge to another product line.

"Are you telling me that I'm not doing a good job?" Lucy asked in an offended voice, ready to cite capture rates and sales figures in self-defense.

"Not at all," said Juan. "On the contrary, I think you *are* doing a good job. But I think you have knowledge about the market that you aren't applying because you need to know more about how to use our lists. You could do a much better job, and I want to give you that opportunity."

Presented in these terms, the idea of working with Bruce, one of the best marketers in the company, seemed a compliment to Lucy. So she willingly agreed to call Bruce to discuss getting together for some meetings in which he would share his know-how about the system. Juan had already alerted Bruce that he wanted him to train one of the marketing managers.

How did Bruce feel about his new responsibility? Like Lucy, he also saw this as a compliment. After twelve years with the same company, with a great marketing record but nowhere to go up within the organization, he had begun to wonder if it wasn't time to look for a job elsewhere. Juan's call meant that he recognized Bruce's worth, and that caused Bruce to rethink his future plans. In the end, Bruce never did leave because Juan had other plans for him besides training Lucy on the database.

## Enriching Others' Jobs and Reviewing Your Own

Juan had been asked to take on leadership of several new product teams. But he couldn't take advantage of this opportunity unless he could find

ways to reduce his own day-to-day workflow. His solution was to delegate many of his routine tasks to Bruce. Enriching Bruce's job would keep his level of performance as high or higher and also free Juan to bring marketing input into many of the new product efforts that up until then had been exclusively product-driven.

When Juan had called Bruce to alert him to his helping Lucy, Juan had also set up a future meeting with Bruce at which he planned to delegate much of the routine work to Bruce. In time, Juan thought, he could empower Bruce, sharing leadership of the group with him. Maybe he would even make him into another coach for the team since Juan's intent was to make each of his marketing people super-performers. Juan began the process of enriching Bruce's job by reviewing his own. He determined which of his tasks he could give Bruce, either delegate or empower him to handle, depending on the nature of the work. As a part of that process, Juan also considered training that Bruce might need to assume these new responsibilities.

Should you want to enrich an employee's job and thereby motivate and add stretch to his or her performance, you need to consider more than training to help those employees make good decisions, solve problems on their own, and otherwise work with little or no guidance from you. Your intent in training is to access intellectual capital—in other words, the ability to use knowledge or ideas gained from one experience and transfer them to another.

This is the less formal means of adding stretch through coaching. Let's look now at how performance appraisals can be the basis for developmental plans that can be used to increase your employees' contributions to the company.

## **The Developmental Side of Performance Appraisals**

Each year, after the year-end appraisal, you should sit down with your employees to discuss their strengths and weaknesses. If an employee has encountered problems during the past year, your objectives for the coming year will include some developmental goals. But if you are appraising one of your better workers, then you might want to create goals that add greater stretch than you would ordinarily suggest for your average performers. These goals could be formalized and made a part of the documentation, or they could be part of a wish list that you and your stars agree to work toward but do not include in the evaluation process.

Let's assume, for instance, that you are creating stretch goals for

someone like Bruce, an employee who has consistently met or exceeded his supervisor's expectations and is feeling frustrated by the lack of opportunities for promotion or new challenges. Bruce would welcome goals that represent a challenge and that involve increasing his employability through training in skills, not for today's work but for tomorrow's opportunities for advancement.

Certainly you would want to make an effort to empower employees like Bruce. You would want to train them in problem solving and critical thinking, familiarize them with the broad picture, and communicate department goals and other critical issues. That should prepare such employees to make good decisions on their jobs. To begin, you might set down on the appraisal form some new standards by which Bruce's work would be measured, such as his participation in the department budgeting process or in product management/marketing meetings or the firm's efforts to expand marketing beyond your country's borders.

On the other hand, you and Bruce might agree that Bruce will work with you on budgeting for the department, replace you at some product management/marketing meetings, and become involved in department global marketing efforts, but you might not include these new responsibilities on the form. Rather, you would provide copies for Bruce and yourself, and you would tell Bruce that these were efforts you wanted him to focus on during the upcoming year. Should he meet the standards for performance as indicated on the appraisal form, as well as realize some or all of the stretch goals, you would acknowledge in the next evaluation his involvement in these efforts and evaluate his performance accordingly.

In developing stretch goals that employees will work toward, you must:

- *Involve the employee.* This point should be a given, but there are still managers who don't realize that they won't get buy-in for any plan if they attempt to impose their thinking on their employees. Even if you make a goal's completion critical to next year's performance evaluation, and achievement of that goal could benefit the employee, you're unlikely to get the person's cooperation if you don't make him or her a part of the planning process.

- *Begin at the beginning and go on from there.* Your task may begin with convincing some top performers that they can achieve their goal, as was the case with Brad, who lacked the self-confidence to speak up at team meetings yet was one of the most creative technicians on Sid's crew.

To get employee support for the stretch goals you want to set, *together with your employees* look at opportunities for growth within the department and determine your stars' interests or aspirations to make the challenges in a re-engineered job more stimulating. If there is a project that the employee can lead, sparing you from this responsibility, discuss it with him or her, pointing to the learning experiences that such an assignment can offer.

- *Write down your development plan.* It doesn't matter whether the plan is included on the formal appraisal form or simply written on a piece of paper attached to the form that you keep filed in your desk and review at quarterly reviews and other meetings with employees. If your involvement is critical to the achievement of specific development goals, you need to note that in writing, too. It's as important for you to assess progress on development goals designed to add stretch to an employee's abilities as it is to review periodically the progress made on more traditional goals.

## Setting Stretch Goals

If you are having a problem with an employee in identifying stretch goals, as a part of the discussion ask him or her, "What can we do to help you maximize your capability?" The purpose of the question is to expand the employee's self-confidence and get the individual to begin to think outside the box that is the job description.

You might want to work with this employee to set two operational goals, both of which will use the individual's ability beyond what the current job requires. Ideally, one such goal might help create higher productivity, whereas the other might improve operations. To build commitment to achieving these two goals, you will need to focus on why these goals are important, giving factual reasons that reflect business return, not just feel-good results. Point to the opportunities and challenges associated with the goal.

As coach, you should make it clear that the stretch goals will likely demand further development on your employee's part. We've talked about the skills your stars will need to learn, but there may be other skills that they will have to unlearn, and they will need patience as they work to achieve these stretch goals that over time will benefit not only their organization but also themselves.

## Motivating the Employee

As part of the stretch-goal exercise, discuss with employees why achieving the goal is important not only to the organization but also for them. Here is where good coaches excel. They know that energizing the workplace through coaching can motivate employees, but they also realize that intrinsic motivation comes from the employees' need to achieve their dreams and aspirations. A good coach is able to help people identify their intrinsic motivators and use them to optimize their performance, to the benefit of both the organization and themselves.

Questions that can help you unearth these inner motivators include:

- What really matters to you?
- How do you think you can be more valuable to the organization?
- What would make you happy professionally? Personally?
- Do you think your professional goals are ambitious enough?
- If you had the choice of any career or position within the organization, including mine, what would you want?
- What accomplishments would build your self-confidence or make you feel better about yourself?

Speak with honesty and listen with empathy so as to better understand how you can support the employees in achieving their aspirations. But never make promises.

### **ANNA: MAKING THE GOAL A REALITY**

While participation in cross-functional teams might seem laborious, inviting an employee to represent you in a high-visibility team could be a stretch goal for that individual. So Anna, the head of marketing for an online food store, discovered.

Anna had been given two assignments on top of an already heavy workload. One task was to complete a key business proposal; the other was to join a team in developing a process for putting content on the company's Web site in a controlled, well-considered manner rather than the helter-skelter style currently used by the IT staff. Both responsibilities were important, but Anna realized that she couldn't do both well and also complete her daily workload. Weighing both the importance

of the two tasks and her own strengths, Anna felt that she could make a bigger and better contribution to her organization by writing the business proposal.

To work on the process team, she chose Joe from among her staff of copywriters. Joe was a good writer, but he also was logical and, more important, knowledgeable about the company's products and its Web site. As critical, maybe more so, he had a need for a responsibility that would re-energize him after working for well over a month on a mundane product catalog. Anna could have asked Joe to take her place on the team and then focus on her own work, but she didn't. Still, she realized that it was important for Joe to speak with her about his contribution to the effort and the team's progress. So she set up a series of weekly feedback (think *coaching*) sessions with him to stay abreast of developments. On one or two occasions, her advice proved helpful to Joe in completing his stretch assignment—and Anna gained a new perspective on Joe's product knowledge and ability to work on a team.

When the project was successfully completed, Anna met with Joe to review the whole effort. She also used the occasion to discuss his taking a course in project management. Joe had demonstrated a strong understanding of teamwork, even the capability to lead a team, but there were project-management skills that he lacked that would hold him back from fully utilizing that ability. As Joe's coach, Anna was determined that he have every opportunity to use his talents.

### **Making the Goal a Reality**

Let's look at how Anna can handle Joe's need for project-management skills. Anna is right in assuming that such knowledge will increase Joe's worth to the organization. To see that Joe understands her plan, she will need to meet with him to do the following things:

1. *Clarify the nature of the training.* Anna needs to point out how good project management can increase the likelihood of a team's achieving its mission. If Joe is to participate on more projects—something that he enjoys based on his recent experience—he will need to have the same skills as other members of such teams.

2. *Identify the goals or outcomes to be reached.* Anna needs to clarify her expectations—both the skills, abilities, and knowledge Joe will acquire from the training and how he can use those competencies to help the marketing team work more effectively with peers and customers on projects to identify food products that are marketable online.

3. *Facilitate the task.* In this instance, *facilitation* is, as defined in Merriam Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary*, "the act of making something

easier.” Toward that end, Anna needs to listen (think *listen actively*) as Joe, a single father, expresses his concern about a semester-long evening course in project management. She will need to identify other training options that are available, such as a series of seminars over time or an online learning program.

4. *Set limitations.* Anna wants Joe to take responsibility for developing the project-management skills. At the same time, she does not want this opportunity to interfere with his daily work. So she has to be clear about what impact she will allow this training to have on his obligations to the department. These are her boundaries.

5. *Empower the employee.* This step may be the most important action Anna can take in coaching Joe—that is, providing an opportunity for him to develop a whole new skill set. Anna has to be prepared for Joe to ask to participate on team projects both within and outside the department so long as they do not interfere with his regular work. She also needs to point out to Joe that many of the skills that he will acquire he can use in the work he is doing on his own.

6. *Backtrack.* Once Anna and Joe have come up with a training plan to fill this gap, they should review the reason behind the training initiative and how the results will benefit both Joe and the department. The best way for Anna to be sure that she and Joe are in agreement is to have him state, in his own words, what they both have settled on. She might say to Joe, “I think this training is important to you and your contribution to the marketing group. I’d like to be sure that we are in agreement about your willingness to take on this training and how you can apply it. Could you summarize what we have both committed ourselves to?”

7. *Follow up.* At subsequent meetings with Joe, Anna needs to discuss what he has learned and how he is applying it.

## Empowerment

Empowering your employees may be one of the most effective ways you have to add stretch to your employees’ performance. The *E* word may have become something of a cliché in recent years, but the concept has never been more important as more and more companies demand greater productivity from their leaner organizations. When we empower employees, we lower decision making to the level of those who report to us. In coaching, when we empower employees, we also demonstrate

trust in their ability to make the right decisions based on the training (think *mind stretch*) they have been provided. And when they make a mistake, we communicate, by supportive response, an awareness that even the best employees can goof up on occasion.

Many efforts at empowerment fail because employees are not given the skills, abilities, and knowledge they need to succeed. That's not so likely to occur when empowerment is part of a coaching effort to boost individual and organizational effectiveness, since training and development are important elements in coaching. To ensure that you are successful in encouraging employee stretch through empowerment, be sure to do the following:

- *Train your employees for the opportunity.* If you don't train them properly, your employees won't be able to handle the work and, equally troublesome, their self-confidence will erode, which will make it more difficult to get them to attempt similar stretches in the future.

- *Believe in your employees' abilities.* Trust your employees to do the job well. You have to show that you have faith in their ability to make the right decisions. That means being patient when they make the wrong decisions.

- *Be clear about your expectations.* This is even more important when you empower employees than when you give them routine tasks. Your employees won't be successful if they have no clear idea of the results you expect. The results serve as a destination by which they can set their course.

- *Build on employees' strengths.* To ensure that coaching isn't the only time your employees feel empowered, focus on those occasions when they do things right. Yes, they will make mistakes and you will need to make note of such incidents. But you don't want these mistakes to discourage your talented employees. In most instances, the problems can be resolved via training or further coaching.

- *Share information.* Put the project, assignment, or task that employees are being empowered to do within the bigger picture. Without that broader perspective, they aren't likely to make the right decisions.

- *Encourage employees to believe in their potential and capabilities.* Help them before problem-solving meetings to see the opportunities there. Get them to look at problems as challenges and to generate creative ideas, then to pursue these ideas in an effort to solve the problems.

- *Recognize your employees' accomplishments.* If you can't provide financial rewards, look for more challenging assignments to give them further opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Or, better yet, redesign their jobs to make fuller use of their newly discovered talents and capabilities.

Recognize that not all of your employees will be successful in their first efforts at empowerment. As their coach, it is your responsibility to help them learn from their mistakes so they can go back and do better the next time. But use your judgment. Some employees lack the aptitude to be empowered. If you suspect after several efforts that this is the situation, give the individual one last chance. If he or she still isn't successful, then you may want to look at the individual's daily work and identify ways to redesign the job so that it makes the most of his or her other strengths.

On the other hand, when your top performers are successful, they blaze a trail for their co-workers to follow—a trail that can lead to increased performance for the whole department. In fact, as coach, you may want to convert your top talent into assistant coaches, responsible for helping your new and average employees improve their performance.

## Departmental Stretch

You build stretch within the entire department when you assign your top performers the task of teaching others how to do their jobs well, as Juan did with Bruce. The greater responsibility enriches their jobs. It also brings home the important role that their performance plays in the department. This in itself can stimulate even greater performance from them.

You can also train your new and average employees to reach these higher levels of performance by observing how your superstars work and comparing their performance with the average workers. By identifying the behaviors that set the former apart from the latter, you have a syllabus for a training program that will help those mediocre performers achieve star performance.

Once you know what makes your good performers as good as they are, hold group meetings during which you share these insights with the group. Not only will you increase the productivity of the department but you will also influence the performance of key personnel, as one star learns from another and your department benefits from the synergy.

The same coaching skill that you use to make your employees do their work better can be used when your group operates as a team or when you lead a cross-functional group. If you think about the last occasion you led a team, you should be able to identify comparable coaching responsibilities you had as team leader. For example, you ensured that the team had the right players, you created ground rules or guidelines with the group to ensure that it operated smoothly, you helped develop a shared sense of purpose and wrote a mission statement that translated the purpose into goals, and you identified the resources the group needed, including training in team skills. Most important, during the course of a meeting, as a facilitator, you coached the team effort to success. As facilitator, you ensured that the discussion ran smoothly, occasionally identifying and remedying behavior that impeded the team's performance.

Jay is a manager who is a great team coach. Jay stimulates discussion by asking his group a general question, and he cuts off discussions that go off the subject by asking the group to summarize the conclusions to date. He brings quiet participants into the discussion by asking them general questions, and he can get the attention of two participants involved in a side conversation by asking one of the two a specific question.

I have been on community teams with Jay, and I know he gets high marks as team coach. How did he develop his skill? Jay points to a manager for whom he worked once who—yes—coached him both in his job and on teams!

Let's look more closely now at coaching sessions—at the conversations that make them.