



Coaching and Mentoring

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Everyone has their own image of a good leader. Some believe that leadership is about commanding respect from your employees so they won't hesitate to follow orders. Others think it's about building trust and making people want to work with and for you and your vision.

A leader should be a coach and a mentor to those who follow them. Leadership is not about holding a firm grip of authority over others. It's about helping them develop and grow so that they can be active contributors to your aligned goals, not just a tool for you to wield.

Matt Mayberry talked about this in an article for Entrepreneur, saying:

True leadership is much more than authority and recognition from the outside world. Instead, leadership is all about developing people and helping others reach their full potential. It's about equipping others with the right tools and strategies to not only maximize the success of an organization, but also the lives of an individual.

Coaching and mentoring your team in a trusting environment will help instill valuable qualities in them. They'll feel more confident in their work, more comfortable offering suggestions and asking questions, and will have the opportunity to learn by doing, which is invaluable for innovation and progress in the workplace. While it's good to have someone leading the charge, if that leader can foster these qualities in a teaching capacity, it can guarantee more satisfying results for all involved.

It's important to understand that coaching and mentoring are two different things, involving different areas of focus, and generating different results. They are, however, both essential to the progress within your team that we discussed above.

So, we'll discuss coaching first.

Coaching is about helping an employee forge the mindset they need to succeed in their role. It involves asking thought-provoking questions that will guide them on a journey of self-discovery, and give them a greater awareness of their responsibilities and how they approach them.

An article from Performance Consultants that sought to define the term opened with this notion:

The essence of coaching is raising awareness and responsibility to unlock potential and maximize performance. Awareness is created through broadening perspectives and improving the focus of attention, which increases interest, insight, and learning.

Consider this in terms of skills you may want to instil within a team member. One that's critical across all industries is accountability, so we'll use this as our primary example of coaching in action. Accountability is accepting responsibility for the requirements of your position, and your conduct towards others. Teams that achieve their goals are made up of people who understand and practice accountability.

You might coach this particular skill by asking questions about how the employee typically reacts to being given a task. Do they consider the deadline? Do they make a plan for completion? Do they ensure that they have sufficient resources?

These are all key questions, but perhaps the most essential question of all, is "Why is this task important to what we're trying to achieve?" A good leader who is trying to coach accountability would focus on this. You teach accountability by helping an employee understand all of the consequences of them not completing a task to satisfaction.

When writing on accountability for Forbes, John Hall theorized that

...when everyone from the top to the bottom follows through on promises, doesn't blame others for mistakes, and supports others in achieving goals, it creates a healthy and positive work culture.

This is exactly what a leader should be trying to foster through their coaching efforts.

If you understand how to coach someone in developing accountability, you can apply the same tactics to other important skills. Things like knowing when to take action, picking up on social cues in a professional environment, being more receptive to feedback, and being more likely to ask questions.

With that in mind, do not underestimate the importance of asking questions while coaching, and being an active listener. Encourage discussion with your team member, instead of making them feel like they're being lectured.

Let's shift our focus now to mentoring. Mentoring is about imparting knowledge, sharing experiences, connecting the employee with resources, and teaching them about practical applications for their skills.

Being a mentor requires a difficult balance. Your position as a leader comes with duties of its own, and so all of your time can't be consumed aiding others.

Vineet Chopra and Sanjay Saint commented on this in an article for HBR:

Clarify what your mentee expects from the relationship, match it against your expectations, and reach a consensus. You may have misapprehension as to the mentee's long-term goals, while the mentee may have an exaggerated notion as to what services you will provide. Such misunderstandings are costly in terms of time and tranquillity.

Once this has been established, you can define the goals of your mentor/mentee relationship. It could last for years, because it will involve sharing your skills, knowledge, and experience, and these are all things that will grow for you, too.

Transferring knowledge is a huge part of mentoring, and you should make sure that it's all relevant to their role. Fill them in on the information that you've gathered, and more importantly, discuss cases in which that knowledge can be put to practical use.

If you're mentoring them about customer service, talk about a time in which you had to solve a specific problem related to that, and explain what knowledge you utilized. If there is an applicable situation, you could also offer them criticism on how they handled a customer service case.

Criticism towards your mentee should always be constructive, and you can do this quite well by giving them personal examples. Sean Peek wrote an advice column for Business News Daily about mentoring in which he said:

There is a way to deliver criticism without breaking their confidence. Sharing your experience is a great way to transfer knowledge without criticizing them directly. For example, tell them about a mistake you made and how you learned from it...They will see the comparison and the subtle message: Don't do what I did. The point is to educate, not tear down the person.

This serves to educate the mentee by increasing relevant and usable knowledge and increases their confidence, as they will know that you've experienced something similar and still ended up progressing to a leadership position.

The best kind of mentoring is practical in nature. Anything that you discuss, you should also try to put into practice. Roleplay certain scenarios, or give the mentee extra tasks to complete that are related to the skills you've been working on. And much like with coaching, creating an environment that is built on trust and active engagement is important.

You should make a point of asking questions and practising active listening when mentoring too.

You should always use your leadership position to help your team instead of obsessing over power and authority.

You can use coaching to guide your employees on a journey of self-discovery. It will help them to build a better understanding and awareness of what they need to do to be a valuable member of the team, and eventually a leader themselves.

And then you can use mentoring to transfer your knowledge, wisdom, and experience to them. This will help them to develop the skills necessary to excel in their role, and it will give them the opportunity to put relevant knowledge to practical use in a trusting and encouraging environment.

So if you want to maximise your position as a leader, start engaging with your employees as a coach and a mentor. Use your own personal experiences to inform the way you teach them, and you'll be rewarded with a more competent team and more effectively completed projects.

That's all for today. Thanks for listening and remember: keep building the best you.

Reading List:

- **[Article]** What True Leadership is All About, Matt Mayberry
- **[Article]** What is Coaching?, Performance Consultants
- **[Article]** Why Accountability is Vital to Your Company, John Hall
- **[Article]** Six Things Every Mentor Should Do, Vineet Chopra & Sanjay Saint
- **[Article]** How to Become a Better Mentor, Sean Peek