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Leadership
Newsletter

Coaching Remote Employees

The case for coaching has been made. Coaching is recognized as a critical competency for leaders from organizations of all sizes and industries. Today, and into the foreseeable future, one of the most important priorities for leaders at all levels is to be catalysts for the high performance and career acceleration of their team members, and coaching is one of the most powerful tools available. When more and more organizations are working in a virtual office across time and space, how can leaders establish the necessary trust-based relationships? How can leaders engage in powerful conversations that challenge assumptions, explore possibilities and inspire others to move from intention to action? Here are some insights to overcome the distance.

Coaching Perspective

The essence of coaching is that it is an act of faith in others. Great coaches see other people as being full of potential. They always assume that others are naturally talented, innately resourceful, and able to learn and change. Great coaches believe that people are fully capable of making their own decisions and solving their own problems. The wise coach knows that when people make their own decisions, create their own solutions, and solve their own problems, they are much more committed to the resulting actions. Whether you are sitting in the office next door or miles away, or whether you are interacting on a daily basis or once a month, you need to develop this perspective and intentionally decide to trust others. Your team members will likely be very aware of what you think of them whether they are in the next office or on the other side of the globe.

Optimistic Tone

The optimism of the coaching perspective extends beyond individual potential. It is a positive attitude toward the work, the team and the future. Great coaches have positive bias and are a source of energy for others in the organization. Their optimism serves as a tone of hope, vitality and inspiration for the personal development of their team members. They choose to focus on the possibilities and opportunities in all situations. A very practical way to do this is by regularly reflecting on the most positive aspects of your work and organization and finding ways to weave your optimistic thoughts into your communication. Whether it is through a personal email, a collective newsletter, a phone call, an instant message or a video conference, it is always important to express optimism in your communication.

Choosing Appreciation

Appreciation is the foundation for the receptivity to feedback, learning and development. The appreciation that people most value occurs when leaders suspend their judgments, ignore their natural critical spirits, and decide to look for the very best in others. It's about focusing on the potential in others rather than on their shortcomings. It's about giving voice to those things that make others special. By making a habit of affirmation and appreciation, leaders create commitment and accountability. Frequently pointing out the strengths, capabilities and successes of your team members is a key to successful coaching. Looking at your teams with an appreciative eye rather than a critical eye will help you create connections built on trust, the main pillar of coaching relationships. Great leaders of remote individuals and teams recognize that they need to be particularly intentional about creating a distinctly appreciative environment in all of their virtual conversations.

High Level of Accountability

Coaching can only occur in an environment of true personal accountability. In this environment, people feel fully responsible for their own emotions, actions, decisions and careers. Great coaches model accountability for themselves and for others. This is not the kind of accountability that lies in a hierarchal relationship, but one that flows from a sense of personal power and self-respect. Great coaches help others take full ownership of their performance. Your remote team members are essentially the CEO's of their own section of the business and need to be treated as such. Encourage them to make their own commitments, set their own deadlines and challenge them to hold themselves accountable. It is critically important for remote team members to feel valued, and great leaders do this by holding them accountable for challenging outcomes.

Coaching is For Everyone

Much of the work that professional coaches do is done via the telephone, and this vehicle is very effective. When a coaching conversation takes place via the telephone, something very special often occurs: the two parties really listen to each other. So pervasive coaching, especially peer coaching, is a powerful team effectiveness process. Every person in your organization can communicate with another person and can challenge them to lift their game, encourage them to see new possibilities, confront them with their own potential, affirm their many talents, and remind them of how great it feels to do extraordinary work. Strongly encourage everyone in your organization to invite another organization member to coach them. Ask people to take on only one coaching assignment at a time and provide the following guidelines: coaching pairs should meet online or over the phone for 30 to 60 minutes every 2 to 3 weeks, for 4 to 6 months. This is plenty of time for great coaching to happen, developing new performance standards and creating new habits. At the end of every coaching engagement, encourage people to invite a different organization member to coach them.

Equipping with Coaching Skills

To fully benefit from the coaching perspective that you are developing in your virtual company, it is very important to equip everyone in your organization with the skills, perspectives, and approaches necessary to immediately coach. Your people need to participate in a highly- experiential training program that introduces them to the potency of coaching, provides them opportunities to practice real coaching and receive direct feedback. Select engaging webinars and virtual classes that will equip your teams with the tools necessary to:

- ask questions that pierce through closely-held assumptions and mental models,
- constructively confront unhelpful behaviors, practices and attitudes,
- affirm strengths, talents and abilities, even if rarely employed, and
- share fresh perspectives no matter how radical.

As the leader of your virtual company, be ready to make a shift, take the first bold step toward becoming a trusted optimistic coach yourself, commit to the talent and personal development of others, and invite all onsite and remote members of your organization to join you on this journey. Coaching has no physical limit; it is a perspective to develop into your company's culture. When coaching is seen as everyone's business, employees require less daily, direct supervision as they accept accountability for their work and strive to reach their full potential. Coaching can change the entire game!

