

COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

VOL. 25, NO. 27

THE CENTRAL OHIO BUSINESS AUTHORITY

FEBRUARY 27, 2009

Teaching employees to coach each other will improve work environment

Great companies of all sizes invest in their future by grooming the next generation of leadership. Yet right now, most businesses are concerned about cutting costs and may be tempted to scale back on that investment.

When businesses struggle, an executive coaching program might seem like an expendable luxury, even though it is precisely during such a period that leaders need the most assistance and support. One way to resolve this dilemma is to establish a continuing, pervasive coaching culture, rather than bringing in a traditional short-term coaching program.

A coaching culture arises out of the impulse to share success with others. In this paradigm, employees are coached, then taught to coach others in the company, which effectively at least doubles the number of coached individuals in a traditional program.

While a traditional coaching program is beneficial to individuals, creating a coaching culture creates tangible results for the business as a whole, as well. It promotes an environment of mutual support, fosters greater commitment to the organization, builds management and leadership skills, improves overall performance and adds to the bottom line, all while addressing the specific problem areas and goals of individuals.

The principles are the same for large and small organizations committed to long-term positive change. Some of these principles include:

RELY ON PROFESSIONAL COACHING FOR AT least the first of those learning to become coaches themselves. Whether you start with a handful of employees or an entire department, the first participants to plant the seeds of a companywide coaching culture must have experienced professional coaching themselves to be able to later coach the others.



INSIGHT

MARY ANN PILOTTE

A professional coach initially helps the individual participants reach their personal goals, but at the same time, the participants are learning what it's like to be coached. When the participants are ready to coach other employees, the professional provides them with right tools to coach: a curriculum and objective feedback.

The company could choose to have professional coaches take over any administrative duties, including evaluation of progress, or it could phase out much of the professional coaches' involvement, depending upon budget. Generally, though, the professionals should at least be available for participants' questions even after the change to a coaching culture is well under way.

My company's experience has been that once a business begins to make the transformation, it wants to not just maintain it but expand it, requiring the ongoing participation of professional coaches. Either way, there's no sense in beginning this endeavor without seeing the benefits develop over the long term.

GET BUY-IN FROM THE TOP TO TRANSFORM the whole. Company leadership must embrace cultural changes of any kind in order for them to work. In creating a coaching culture, the right signals from the C-suite can increase enthusiasm and participation, thereby increasing the chances for the culture to flourish.

Try establishing an advisory board for oversight and to engage people beyond the

first participants. The board should include executives and anyone else interested in promoting a coaching culture.

In one such instance, a client's advisory board initially consisted primarily of representatives from the departments where the coaching culture was to be established.

Soon, people from other areas were intrigued, human resources managers joined the board and not long afterward, lower-level employees were asking to observe its meetings.

KEEP PARTICIPATION FREE FROM CONFLICTS of interest. Issues brought up during private coaching sessions should be confidential and without workplace repercussions. Coaches should never work with anyone who reports directly to them, although certainly supervisors need to have input during the coaching process to help set goals and devise a measurement structure to gauge improvements.

Being coached, learning to coach and coaching others all require a considerable time commitment, and it's important for morale and job satisfaction not to draft anyone into unwanted tasks. When participation is voluntary, participants perceive it as a benefit with no hidden agenda.

After all, one-on-one coaching isn't usually widely available, so most people are thrilled to be coached, and they usually derive personal satisfaction from helping others achieve their goals.

At the same time, leaders discover that their investment in their company's talent produces gratifying results far beyond the scope of the average coaching program.

MARY ANN PILOTTE is executive vice president of Gallagher Consulting Group, a Columbus-based communications consulting, organizational planning and executive coaching firm. 614-854-9658 | maryann@gallagherinc.com