

COACHING TEAMS

By Jean Strosinski, PCC

Fifth article of six in the series: *Coaching for Performance*

High levels of performance in the workplace produce great results. We have all heard this comment before and I don't believe I have ever heard anyone question that statement. For me, the question I often ask is - will these great results come from the efforts of one individual or from many? Whether your company's environment or work processes are engineered in formal teams, or not, few products or services offered are the result of one individual's effort. Actually, most of us are members of many work teams. Each team begins with a commitment to high performance and is facilitated by a leader expected to foster and ensure great results.

Coaching is the primary tool for both managing and developing teams. Coaching a team to high performance is based on the same principles as coaching the individual. A reminder from John Whitmore (*Coaching For Performance*, 1996, p. 130) states "the basis of coaching to improve team performance is not imposing but increasing individual and collective AWARENESS and RESPONSIBILITY." Increasing the collective awareness and responsibility of all team members are key.

The coach will understand that teams perform optimally when they reach a stage of cooperation or "norming." Here, the team members are comfortable with each other, recognize their varied responsibilities and rely on each other's strengths and talents. The challenge for the coach is how to move the team efficiently and expediently through the beginning stages "forming and storming." Back to the basics of coaching – LISTEN, QUESTION, RESPOND, DISCUSS AND SUPPORT (see the 3rd article in this series DEVELOPING YOUR COACHING SKILLS). The art of questioning becomes the coaching tool of choice, at this point, to move a team solidly into "norming" and then on to "performing."

ASK QUESTIONS. Ask questions of individuals. Ask questions of the large group by pairing team members for small group discussions. Ask questions of small groups to initiate a discussion by the large group. In the discussions, mix team member pairs with those who serve different functions. Actively participate in the small group discussions. Your role as the coach is to encourage the team's thinking toward options – how will they produce the great results? The large group discussion should result in: the team's goal(s), understanding the reality, identifying options and team resources and, as one, agreeing to an action plan.

What are the questions you can ask of your team to get started? What will you ask to support the team's options? The following questions are offered as a skeleton set of coaching questions to coach your team. (Whitmore, 1996, p. 148-149)

Goal:

What form of outcome are you seeking by the end of this coaching session?
What intermediate steps can you identify, with their time frames?

Reality:

What obstacles do you need to overcome on the way?
What resources do you already have? Skills, time, enthusiasm, money, support, etc?

Options (*Team Resources*):

What are all the different ways you could approach this issue? What else could you do?
Which would give the best result?
Which would give you the most satisfaction?

Will (*Action Plan*):

Which option or options do you choose? What are your criteria and measurements for success?

These questions are a start for the coach. There are hundreds of questions to ask and most are dependent on team dynamics, the project at hand, time, expected outcomes, etc.

The benefits to coaching a team include using a thorough process, highlighting details, resolving conflicts early, ensuring clarity and understanding, drawing on all the team's resources, promoting ownership and commitment, along with building self-esteem and self-motivation.

The primary disadvantage to coaching is time – it may take a bit longer than a prescriptive team briefing. Quality and high levels of performance do take time to initiate. If you view this process and the time requirement as a luxury you can't afford, then my question for you is: Can you continue to afford your dwindling work force, high personnel turnover, and minimal performance results?

If your answer is "NO" to this last question, then you do have a choice...**COACH YOUR TEAM!** Start by asking the questions above and tune in.

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