



# Tip Sheet

communication from

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## Performance Coaching: Fostering Commitment and Superior Performance

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Over the course of the last year I've conducted in-depth interviews with forty-five managers and supervisors concerning their greatest challenges and the non-technical skills that would make their day-to-day supervision easier and more effective. A distinct need emerged — a performance coaching method that gains results.

*"The primary goal of a coaching conversation is to help employees develop and grow."*

Performance coaching is the feedback and help a manager provides to employees in analyzing their performance and other job behaviours for the purpose of increasing job effectiveness. Lacking this crucial skill managers are generally uncomfortable giving corrective feedback and consider doing so an "unnatural act". Most managers choose to ignore poor performance and hope that problems will eventually disappear. This rarely happens, and ingrained poor performance often becomes a source of frustration for everyone.

*"Timely coaching contributes significantly to productivity improvement."*

While most performance feedback conversations occur in conjunction with the annual performance review, timely coaching sessions throughout the year contribute significantly to productivity improvement and heightened motivation. If done well, a coaching conversation conveys concern and interest in an employee's success.

In turn, this creates an environment that supports and values the individual. When employees feel supported and valued, they are more committed to the job and have a more positive attitude toward the workplace. Good coaching—committed employees.

The primary goal of a coaching conversation is to help employees develop and grow. Secondary goals are to secure mutual understanding of a given situation and to establish desire on the employee's part for change.



### Conducting a Coaching Meeting

After preparing for the meeting, which includes collecting examples of the behaviour or actions that need improvement, invite the employee to join you for a short private conversation.

The conversation itself will have three phases—rapport building, exploring and diagnosing, and action planning.

In phase one, the desired outcome is to set the employee at ease and to establish a comfortable environment encouraging exchange of information and mutual problem solving. Set the tone by postponing phone calls, closing the door and thanking the individual for joining you.

Listening skills are crucial. Eye contact and body language convey your interest in a two-way conversation focused on a successful outcome. Oral communication skills such as paraphrasing, open-ended questioning and reflecting the employee's message contribute to success.



*“Performance coaching is a core management task. It is face-to-face leadership.”*

The second phase—exploring and diagnosing—can begin with a thoughtful outline of the behaviour or action requiring improvement and an investigation with the employee about the possible causes of the difficulties. It is critical to help the employee examine for themselves the possible barriers to their performance. Invite the employee to offer suggestions about how to resolve the problem or, at the very least, to work with you to find appropriate corrective actions.

Employees sometimes need to be reminded about a job’s expected outcome. Occasionally they need to be taught how to do part of a job they don’t fully understand. The help you could give may be technical, it may be the mediation between departments or it could even be resolving a misunderstanding between the two of you.

The final phase of a coaching conversation is action planning. This is where you and the employee plan the specific action steps designed to solve the performance problems. A number of alternatives and their advantages and disadvantages may be examined. Help the employee choose the best alternative and set up a step by step program aimed at improvement. Establish a schedule to review progress.

One of the most important parts of this final stage is communicating your support for and interest in the employee’s success. Finish the meeting by thanking the employee for discussing the issues with you, and express your genuine hopes for their future achievement. Invite the employee to let you know how he or she feels about the discussion, and work toward finishing on a high note. It is essential that both parties leave the conversation feeling hopeful and positive about the future.

Performance coaching is a core management task. Managing others in a way that conveys your commitment to their success will be reflected in the commitment and motivation they will offer in return.

## Quick Tip: Seeking Clarification and Mutual Understanding.

- P** Ask **permission** to talk with the person. Make sure the conversation takes place in private.
- I** Outline your **intent**. “The reason I want to talk to you is...” Emphasize your desire for a positive outcome.
- P** **Perception**. “This is what I saw/observed...” Make your comments timely and specific.
- I** Focus your comments on your personal and specific **interpretation** of what you experienced. “This is what I experienced.” or “This is what I took your actions/comments to mean.”
- C** **Check** with the person. “Is this what you intended to convey?” or “Is this what you meant?” Listen mindfully.

Seek clarification and mutual understanding about the desired outcome and how the situation can be improved.

We hope that this Tip Sheet is of value to you; that it will start you thinking, and most of all, that it will provide you with helpful suggestions to improve your performance coaching skills.

*Multiple copies of this Tip Sheet are available for distribution within your organization while quantities last. Please contact Ron Einblau or Harriett Lemer. ■*

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