

Whether or not you are an avid sports fan or athlete yourself, chances are that you can appreciate the value of good coaching and the role it can play in the success of a team.

Talent, skill, and engagement from the 'players' absolutely factors in, but when you boil it down, at the core and fundamental to a team's success is... the coach.

Not only does coaching help to optimize team performance, but it can also help to foster effective communication, serve as a temperature gauge of your own performance, and better understand the goals your team has for themselves both in their current role and in the next steps of their career path.

Remember, some of the best 'coaches' have been those who have helped their team members to achieve their very best individual success – this may include moving on to another team or position.

Be sure to consult with your HR team and other senior leaders about the tools available to support employees in regards to their on-going performance and career development. You may also find it useful to leverage additional tools (Career Maps, Assessments, Tip Sheets, etc.) on the **mycareer** website to assist you in engaging your team and supporting their development goals.

What can you do as a manager to help your employees be the best they can be? Here are five tips that can help:

1 Apply These Principles When Having Coaching Conversations

When sharing your thoughts, insights, and observations about performance and career development with members of your team, ensure you are:

Specific – Clearly tell your team member what they are doing well, and why you value the behaviour (impact on team, organization, customer, etc.) or where they may need to continue to develop to achieve their objectives/career goals and why (impact on team, organization, customer, etc.). Include specific examples of how and when the behaviour was demonstrated. When talking about areas for development, it might also be useful to map out your expectations going forward.

Honest – Be direct. And, try to avoid superlatives/exaggerated terms. Tell your team member as honestly and accurately as you can what they are doing well, and where they can continue to grow.

This is important in every coaching conversation, but particularly those around career development. Employees are coming to these types of conversations likely feeling somewhat vulnerable - It is important that your team members have a clear and realistic understanding of what may be required to advance their careers in the areas they are most interested in.

Timely – For greatest impact, give feedback soon after a behaviour is exhibited, project is completed, presentation is delivered, etc. The only exception to this is when emotions are running high and need to be allowed time to settle in order to facilitate effective communication.

Helpful – Your ultimate goal is to help your team member. It is important that they view you as both a source of praise for a job well done and someone they can turn to when things are not going as well as they could. You have been tapped as a people leader in your organization for a reason. Likely, it is because you are resourceful, a strong communicator, solutions focused, a team player and goals driven. Leverage these skill sets when delivering performance feedback and career coaching.

Consistent – Ensure that your messaging to employees is consistent. Be clear in your expectations and your delivery. In addition, try to hold up your end of the bargain - If you made a commitment to have a career conversation /meeting (particularly if your team member initiated it) – have it or provide a reasonable alternative. If you made a commitment to provide on-going support to an employee – provide it. If you want to see a particular behaviour /competency reflected across your team – model it.

While you might not be a coach for a professional sports team or individual athlete, you do have an important role to play in motivating, inspiring and helping your team be the best it can be.

2 Schedule Regular Check Points with your Team

Team meetings and 1:1 check points are crucial to keeping the communication lines open – these meetings are a chance for you to connect with each other to: ask questions, clarify expectations, share progress on projects/goals, offer feedback, receive feedback on how you as a manager are doing/can support them, and discuss any emerging priorities/hot button issues.

These meetings serve not only as a chance to discuss the day-to-day, but also revisit any priorities identified at performance appraisal time or outcomes stemming from a career conversation a team member has had with you.

Best practice suggests weekly/bi-weekly meetings as a team and quarterly 1:1 meetings in terms of frequency; but, be sure to consult with your HR Team and Senior Leaders to understand what the approach is for your organization.

3 Ensure Coaching is Ongoing

Feedback is important. Particularly to those who are in the early – mid career stages. And, it should not be limited to the formal performance review process.

If other work-related priorities are getting in the way of you giving regular performance feedback, set up task reminders in your calendar to let you know that it's time to touch base with your employees.

You can also keep a journal where you make notes on successes, incidents and challenges as they happen. Use these notes to guide these touch points, 1:1 meetings, and later to help with writing performance appraisals. This approach also helps to ensure that the employee is not blindsided or unaware of a particular aspect of their performance.

4 The Sandwich Approach Isn't Effective

Some believe that it's easier for employees to digest constructive feedback if it's sandwiched between two pieces of positive feedback. This approach can sometimes be confusing and as we often encourage employees to focus on their strengths, they may not fully appreciate the importance of you asking them to adjust, modify their behaviour, or continue to develop in a particular area.

Take a direct and honest approach to feedback – focus on the behaviour/skill and the overall impact to the team/ organization, not the person themselves. When delivering the feedback, be sure to ask the employee for their impressions and ideas on ways that they can move this aspect of their development forward.

Also be sure to outline how you will be supporting your team member going forward and remind them that, while important, it is only one aspect of their performance. Together, you will help them to 'be better' and achieve their goals.

5 Ask for Feedback... on you!

If you want to build strong relationships with your team, accept that feedback should be a two-way street. Ask your team how you can better support them in working towards their performance and career goals. Some guiding questions may include:

How do you feel I am doing at offering feedback and supporting your performance?

Are you feeling like we are on track for supporting your career and performance development goals?

Are there things I could be doing differently? Could be starting to do?

Actively listen to what they have to say (you might learn something revealing). Once you've heard what they have to say, make a plan and act on it where appropriate.