

# LEADERSHIP COACHING

NECESSARY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION'S LONG-TERM SUCCESS

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The familiar line “Put me in coach, I’m ready to play” was sung long ago by musician John Fogerty as part of his popular song “Centerfield”. Whether the listener was a baseball fan or simply thought the tune was catchy, the song has stayed popular to this day.

Fogerty’s song may not be the first thing you think of when you think of the word ‘coach’ but it was amongst the top things that came to mind when penning this article. Regardless of whether you are a sports fan or not, the idea of a coach is one that is familiar with most everyone. Coaches are individuals that come alongside [typically] younger, less developed or accomplished individuals and help them to become more developed, more skilled, and more accomplished in their sport of choice. At least this is the typical understanding of what a coach is and what a coach does.

In more recent years, other disciplines and professional areas have started to attach the word coach to their work. There are now reading coaches, life coaches, acting coaches, happiness coaches, and even birth coaches. The Merriam Webster’s definition of coach is “one who instructs or trains.” Take that definition and couple it with the aforementioned types of coaches, and the combinations start to make more sense.

Similar to how Fogerty’s song is fondly remembered by many, the idea of a childhood coach is something that often sticks with individuals as having made a positive impact. If you ask people if they can think of a positive experience they had growing up where someone came alongside them and coached them in something—sports, school, life—most people will

be able to think of something impactful. However, when you ask people if they can think of a positive experience they have had as an adult—specifically in the workplace—where someone came alongside them and coached them in something, you’ll likely receive a vastly different response, and not always one for the better.

Why is that? Why does it seem that once we “graduate” into adulthood and enter the working world, the concept (and importance) of coaching others seems to be diminished? Well, it’s likely for many reasons, but one main reason is that adults can easily neglect to remember the importance of coming alongside colleagues and direct reports to coach them into success due to the vast number of responsibilities that seem to pull them in multiple directions.



Okay, so adults are busy and neglect to focus on coaching employees. That can't really be all that big of a deal, can it? Well, actually it can be ... and it is. According to a recent report from SHRM (The Society for Human Resource Management), April 2022 marked "the 11th consecutive month that more than four million workers left their job." Read that again! Four million people have left their jobs in the U.S. alone every single month for the past 11 months. That is a truly staggering number.

Though the reasons people leave their jobs are plentiful, there are some constants. Money, of course, can play a role, but surprisingly to some, it is not usually the main driver for why people leave their jobs. Not too long ago, Gallup completed their largest ever global study of the future of work and published their findings in a book titled "It's the Manager". They found that the "quality of managers and team leaders is the single biggest factor in your organization's long-term success." Of course long-term success and employee retention are not identical issues, but it's not too far a stretch to make the connection that if an organization is not able to hold onto their talent, they will not be successful—in the short-term or the long-term.

So, how does an organization increase employee engagement, which in turn increases employee retention, which in turn increases overall organizational success? Well, there is no one right answer to the question, but one great approach is the development and instillation of a leadership coaching culture within the organization.

What is a leadership coaching culture? How does it work? How will it help to develop long-term success? These are all great questions. How they're answered will make a difference in how an organization implements the creation of a leadership coaching culture.

According to Jeffrey Gaines, in his writing for PositivePsychology.com, "Leadership coaching has a two-fold meaning: it refers to working with the leaders of an organization to help them maximize their abilities and lead their teams well, and it also refers to a leadership style that executives use when working with their teams." Additionally, leadership coaching "emphasizes active listening rather than lecturing, asking the right questions rather than providing answers, and presenting leaders with various options rather than giving directions." Ultimately, a leadership coaching culture looks like a culture of trust, respect, humility, and putting the needs of the organization first.

Additionally, leadership coaching places emphasis on the development of others' strengths and abilities. As part of empowered leaders empowering others, a leadership coaching culture also focuses on developing employees, which in turn can create an increased desire to stay with the organization. According to Gallup, three key elements of career growth are providing employees with the opportunity to make a difference, clearly defined parameters for what success looks like, and allowing for the right fit with individual career aspirations.

A leadership coaching culture can also help organizations to clearly define employee performance by way of identifying three important dimensions: individual work and achievements, teamwork and collaboration with other team members, and customer focus.

Ultimately, a leadership coaching culture creates pathways for open communication where supervisors come alongside their direct reports and provide support and direction, while simultaneously relaying expectations and clearly defined goals and objectives.

Jim Clifton and Jim Harter share, "Employees develop through the discoveries they make as they perform—and as they are coached." The authors go on to say that, "managers should ask themselves: 'How can I encourage individuals to make more discoveries about themselves?'" A leadership coaching culture helps employees to discover more about themselves and their skills, abilities, and aspirations by way of asking questions rather than dictating terms; by coming alongside and providing support rather than hierarchical, top-down leadership.

This form of leadership is not always appropriate or applicable, but when it is, it provides an alternate way of leading and coaching that produces results. It is also worth remembering that different employees respond differently and have different ideas of what growth and development look like for them. A leadership coaching culture allows space for leaders and managers to get to know their employees and provide necessary support and direction in order to drive short-term and

long-term results—for the individual and the organization.

When thinking about the practical 'nuts and bolts' of what a leadership coaching culture entails, leaders can consider asking the following questions in order to encourage meaningful dialogue between leaders and their direct reports:

- What are your recent successes?
- What are you most proud of?
- What rewards and recognition matter most to you?
- How does your role make a difference?
- How would you like to make a bigger difference?
- How are you using your strengths in your current role?
- How would you like to use your strengths in the future?
- What knowledge and skills do you need to get to the next stage of your career?

A leadership coaching culture takes time to develop and even more time to implement. It's not a quick and easy fix. It takes an investment of time and careful attention to the needs of the individuals and the organization. It is an investment of time and attention that is worth it. As stated, it develops trust and where trust abounds, psychological safety exists, and where employees feel safe, they are more committed and willing to take chances that can lead to new, innovative ideas and success.

It has been said that "Nothing elevates performance more than coaching." While the merit of this statement can be debated, results tend to speak for themselves. There are multiple factors that lead to success but leadership coaching is certainly a major one.

The next time someone in your organization is asked about a coach that came alongside them and helped to develop them, hopefully they will point to a leader within their organization and say they not only identified their potential, but allowed them to put it into practice and helped them become more successful, which in turn helped the organization to become all the more successful as well.

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