

Characteristics of an Effective Coach

1. **An effective coach is positive.** The job of a coach is not correcting mistakes, finding fault and assessing blame. Instead, a coach's function is achieving productivity goals by coaching staff to peak performance.

For example, Caseworker, Ken knows he is supposed to get certain reports in by the tenth of the month, but he never gets them done until the fourteenth or fifteenth. You have talked to him about the problem several times, but Ken still does not get the reports in on time.

Try the positive approach. It is the difference between saying, "Get those reports in by the tenth" and asking, "What do you need to do differently to get your monthly reports in by the tenth?"

The first statement reaps resentment and excuses -- but no improvement in performance. The supervisor continues thinking of Ken as a problem; Ken goes on thinking of the supervisor as a jerk.

The second approach can get the agency what it wants -- the reports turned in on time. And the supervisor has a shot at winning the bonus prize -- a worker with a more cooperative attitude and improved time management skills to apply to the next task.

2. **An effective coach is enthusiastic.** As leaders, supervisors and managers set the tone. Their attitude is catching. Project gloom and doom, and you will get gloom and doom back from your staff. The supervisor who fabricates reasons why things will not work out is never disappointed by staff. Bring positive energy to every encounter.
3. **An effective coach is supportive.** Being supportive means a lot more than providing an encouraging word and a pat on the back. The job of a coach is to get staff what they need to do their jobs well, including tools, time, training, answers to questions and protection from outside interference. To lead, one must serve, anticipating needs and preventing problems from happening.
4. **An effective coach is trusting.** Does a supervisor or manager expect workers to be infallible, performing their jobs on time, every time, with no errors? Of course not. Everybody makes mistakes. Staff have good days and not-so-good days, times of peak efficiency and times when they slide into a stupor. Staff members are human, a characteristic they share with their coach.

Good coaches trust staff to be conscientious, to tell the truth and to give a reasonable day's work for a day's pay. Most people are conscientious and honest, with an inherent desire to do their jobs well. And when they see the supervisor or manager applying high standards to their own conduct, they will be even more likely to do the same. Tell staff what to do and then clear out and let them do it.

Characteristics of an Effective Coach (continued)

"Trusting" should not be confused with "gullible." Supervisors and managers will have their share of behavior problems, personnel conflicts, and incompetence to deal with. However, do not assume the negative. Side solidly with the workers until and unless they give compelling reason not to. When there is a problem, work with the employee to correct it. You will wind up with a better employee -- and a loyal one, too.

- 5. An effective coach is focused.** Effective communication is specific and focused. Deal in particulars. Keep the task manageable. You are far more likely to get action if an employee leaves your office focused on resolving the issue at hand.
- 6. A good coach is goal-oriented.** Base assignments on clear, definable goals. Tie specific tasks to those goals. Communicate those goals to the people who actually have to do the work.

For example, if a worker leaves the supervisor's office pondering "Why does she want me to do that?" after the supervisor explained an assignment, the supervisor has only done half the job. The supervisor gave the "what" but not the "why."

- 7. An effective coach is observant.** Tom Peters (author of *A Passion for Excellence*, etc.) talks of "management by walking around." According to Peters, it is not good enough to sit in your office even if your "door is always open." Supervisors and managers need to get out and mingle with the staff.

In addition, though, they need to pay attention. Being observant means more than just keeping your eyes and ears open. Supervisors and managers need to be aware of what is not said as well as what is, and pick up on body movements and tone of voice. A supervisor who is paying attention, will not have to wait for somebody to tell him about a problem.

A good tip is to be obviously observant. Staff should know that the supervisor is observant and paying attention. The supervisor maintains eye contact. When they are out and about the office observing, he makes sure employees know he's there. Nobody likes a spy.

- 8. A good coach is respectful.** Equity requires equal access to jobs, pay and advancement regardless of issues such as race, religion, ethnicity, or gender. However, it goes beyond that to a work environment where co-workers abandon limiting stereotypes and expectations, and respect each other as individuals. In the culturally competent agency, differences are not just tolerated, they are celebrated. This is the case because everybody benefits from those differences.

Characteristics of an Effective Coach (continued)

Respect everyone around. Respect their rights as employees and as human beings. It can be as simple as avoiding making assumptions. It can be as complex as learning that a gesture made frequently to indicate approval comes across as demeaning to someone from another culture.

The good supervisor gets to know the workers and treats them all as individuals with respect.

- 9. An effective coach is patient.** Patience is not just a virtue, it is a survival skill in the workplace. Staff are not stupid, and they are not trying to drive their supervisor or manager crazy. They are busy, and they are preoccupied, just as the supervisor is.

Tell them again, but find other words to do so. Use a new approach and ask them to explain the instructions to you, as if you were a new worker. That will show that they understand the directions and it will help them internalize those directions. As the old saying goes, "To teach is to learn twice."

- 10. An effective coach is clear.** If the worker did not hear it right, maybe it is because the supervisor or manager did not say it right.

For example, I explain something to you, but you do not understand, so I repeat it, using essentially the same words, only louder and/or more slowly. The scenario continues, with both of us getting frustrated, angry and further apart.

Whose fault is it? Yours, for not understanding? Or mine, for failing to find a more effective way to communicate? It does not matter whose fault it is. You and I are not connecting.

The bottom line is if you are trying to communicate and the other person does not understand, take responsibility for making the connection. Do not make matters worse by just repeating the same words louder or more slowly.

- 11. An effective coach is assertive.** While supervisors and managers are being positive, enthusiastic, supportive, trusting, focused, goal-oriented, observant, respectful, patient, and clear, they should not lose sight of this critical fact of organizational life -- supervisors have to supervise, managers have to manage. Being a good coach does not mean you are passing on your responsibility to make decisions. It means supervisors or managers are making sure that they understand what is involved in any decision, that they can communicate decisions effectively and that staff are willing and able to act on those decisions appropriately. That is how things get done.

Being assertive means maintaining a strong presence. It is acting with confidence and persistence.