

Coaching Delivered by Managers

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| FILE | 10621_KRISTY_ONORATO_COACHING_DELIVERED_BY_MANAGERS_MGMT850_ONORATO_1218033_944550199.DOCX (38.99K) | | |
| TIME SUBMITTED | 05-NOV-2017 07:11PM (UTC-0500) | WORD COUNT | 4738 |
| SUBMISSION ID | 874788671 | CHARACTER COUNT | 28747 |

How Does Coaching Delivered By Managers Motivate Employees and Increase Work
Performance?

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Abstract

Coaching, as a practice, is a controversial topic because some organizations avoid it, while others find it a necessary practice to improve employee motivation and performance. In order to answer the question “How does coaching delivered by managers motivate employees and increase performance”, both current and past literature were reviewed. The aim of this paper is to determine the validity of coaching delivered by managers and its impact on employee performance and motivation levels. By reviewing Sir John Whitmore’s past work alongside the current literature, the revelation has been made that coaching does increase employee motivation and work performance when delivered by managers in the workplace. Where research is lacking is in the identification of how each component of coaching directly affects the coachee. Challenges of coaching include employee demotivation, incentives and rewards, time constraints, and over-coaching. The future of managerial coaching should include proper training of managers through the use of the International Coach Federation, goal setting sessions with employees, and regular check-ins with employees by their managers to ensure performance and motivation remain at high levels.

Keywords: coaching, employee motivation, work performance, Whitmore

How Does Coaching Delivered By Managers Motivate Employees and Increase Work Performance?

In the past, during my professional career working for a large organization, I have found that a critical motivating factor has been missing in my day to day functions as a worker. As I had struggled along with my fellow employees to identify why morale, motivation, and performance are lacking, I have found that one of the possible explanations for this is the lack of coaching delivered by managers. “Coaching delivers results in large measure because of the supportive relationship between the coach and the coachee, and the means and style of communication used” (Whitmore, pg. 9). This is where traditional style leadership where the manager acts as a dictator by giving orders to employees has become ineffective. Employees in the current workplace, myself included, desire to be managed in a way that fosters growth and recognition for a job well done.

The topic of coaching has been associated with numerous studies linking it to employee motivation and increased work performance. To truly get to the root of this theory, it is necessary to identify the key elements of this issue in order to draw concrete connections between coaching, employee motivation, and increased work performance. This paper will not only explore the connections between coaching, motivation, and performance, but also provide useful information to organizations concerning how to cultivate the employee-manager relationship through the application of coaching.

Managers assume a very important role in motivating their staff. Considering the fact that every manager desires to have a staff that performs workplace tasks efficiently, they must realize the important role that coaching plays in developing the type of motivation that improves workplace performance. Pousa and Mathieu (2017) state that, “Coaching has been identified as a

key managerial behavior that organizations must promote to develop employees and achieve higher levels of performance” (p. 75). Further, by helping employees to set goals and develop an action plan, leaders can reap the benefits of the heightened motivation that occurs with these employees. Managers must realize that they play a vital role in the coaching process, which leads to employee motivation and increased performance. The literature review below will take an in depth look at how coaching delivered by managers influences organizations and the impact it has on employees.

Literature Review

A review of literature pertaining to the value that management coaching brings to boosting employee morale and increasing workplace performance was conducted to answer the question, “How does management coaching motivate employees and increase job performance”? While many organizations struggle to meet budgetary constraints and production deadlines, what these same organizations overlook the significant role that management coaching plays as a instrument to solve this dilemma. “Organizational structures that integrate effective coaching can increase performance outcomes and realize long-term benefits” (Davis, 2015, p.7). These benefits are great cause to research this topic further and determine the validity of the literature available.

To begin this discussion and reach a well researched answer, I will define the terms coaching, management coaching, employee motivation, job performance, and what it means to increase job performance. By breaking the question into smaller parts, deeper connections can be made between the manager as a coach’s role and the employee as a performer’s role. To arrive at the true essence of this paper, I will point out the shortcomings of management training for coaching development and employee demotivation as a result of the absence of management coaching.

Coaching Definition

Historically speaking, coaches were known as team leaders for sporting events. The coach would rally the team together and encourage the players to utilize their skills to play their best game. As time has evolved, the definition of the coach has become more widespread and has even reached corporate industries. The discussion has continued to intensify as organizations have begun to research and learn that coaching has become a necessary tool in employee

engagement and performance. Much like teammates on a sports team, employees in a workplace desire to be coached and motivated in order to perform at their highest levels.

The term 'coaching' has a wide variety of definitions, but for the sake of this literature review, I am defining it using Sir John Whitmore's definition, "Coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximize their own performance" (p. 10). By encouraging managers to serve as a conduit to aid employee growth, the employee becomes inspired to grow and progress utilizing the capabilities that he/she already possesses. Further, "Coaches work on improving the performance and well-being of an individual or group through setting goals, exploring values and beliefs, and facilitating their clients in creating plans of action. This is achieved not by advising or telling, but largely by questioning to enhance awareness and self-directed learning" (Wilson, p. 11). The true strength in coaching is the evolution of a team directive and accomplishment of goals. Now, the discussion will begin to include management coaching as a combined function within the organization to promote employee growth.

Management/Managerial Coaching Definition

Management coaching or managerial coaching is a newer term that not only encompasses the definition of coaching as discussed above, but also includes the manager as a key player within the organization establishing goals with the employee upon which to develop the necessary skills utilizing the tools provided by the manager. Ismail, Ahmad, and Zainol (2016) state that, "In organizations, an employer establishes a human resource development and management to plan and implement managerial coaching to enhance organizational and employees career development. This coaching program emphasizes on knowledge, equipment, and opportunities to guide employees to be effective workers" (p. 98). As a result, employee motivation, engagement, and performance will be enhanced, thus benefitting the company.

Pausa and Mathieu (2014) further describe managerial coaching as, “A managerial tool to help his or her subordinates achieve a series of externally set organizational goals and increase their job-related performance” (p. 77). The link to managerial coaching and employee motivation will be established and take place below.

Employee Motivation Definition

A great deal of research has been conducted on the topic of employee motivation. The basic definition of employee motivation according to Ismail, Ahmad, and Zainol (2016) is, “Employees’ motivation is normally defined as an interest and attitude that influence trainees to attend, learn and master the knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as have positive attitude towards their fields” (p. 100). Workplace motivation may be derived simply by one’s interest in their role within the organization, however; continued motivation must be fostered by external sources. These types of external sources come in the form of reward incentives and managerial coaching. While the manager may have little control over an organization’s reward incentives, leadership does control the level of coaching provided to keep the staff member engaged in their work. Based on the research of Dean (2017), “If you want to get your best people performing at a higher level, there is little that will give you a better return than coaching” (p. 33). The above statement exemplifies why coaching is so important to maintaining elevated levels of employee morale and motivation. This brings the discussion to the element of job performance and how coaching delivered by managers positively contributes to this.

Job Performance and Ways to Increase It

Any type of leader within an organization strives to meet organizational goals with a staff that is performing their job at the highest level. For the sake of this paper, I will define job performance as, “The role an employee plays in the operation of a company” (Fracaro, 2015,

p.9). This role can be either a positive or a negative one, which means that the employee could help or harm the company in the long run based on their performance on the job. While a mediocre display of work performance may be acceptable by some leaders, it may not always be desirable if specific organizational results are being aimed for. This is where management coaching can be used to develop a set of employee goals and a plan of action to achieve them.

According to Pousa and Mathieu (2014) coaching and performance levels are linked, “Our findings suggest that by using coaching, managers can bring about higher role performance by helping their subordinates increase their own job performance” (p.86). By establishing this important link between managerial coaching and employee performance levels, organizations can better understand the viability of coaching as an essential organizational practice that should be adopted to optimize the functionality of the business. Further, the manager as coach will be able to expand both the employee and enterprise’s goal outputs. Now that the connections between management coaching, employee motivation, and performance levels has been established, it is important to begin the discussion of management challenges associated with coaching and achieving these outcomes.

Challenges for Managers

Employee Demotivation. Organizational managers must use caution when trying to motivate employees. “If managers see motivation as an effective solution for the good course of the organization and achieving a certain level of performance, then employees consider it as an essential part for individual development, however; excessive motivation or demotivation in an activity can lead to poor performance or even failure” (Ilcuic, p. 184). When leaders practice excessive encouragement with employees, the opposite effect can occur; which can lead to

employee demotivation. This is why manager self-awareness and responsibility (Whitmore) is crucial to practicing the appropriate level of coaching in the correct situations (Whitmore, 2009).

Financial Compensation and Rewards. Another challenge that managers face when trying to motivate employees and improve performance is lacking control of financial compensation and rewards. While financial compensation and rewards may not be the only motivator of work performance, it remains a very influential one. Employees that have been surveyed, according to Catalina Iluic's study (2016), hold financial compensation and rewards very high on their view of job satisfaction. Another study conducted by Mehta, Dahl, and Zhu (2017) states that, "Monetary rewards facilitate higher approach motivation to achieve an original performance, whereas social-recognition rewards lead to more conservatism in an effort to achieve a more normative performance" (p. 537). This is not to say that financial rewards are the only performance motivators, however, old-fashioned raises are still a powerful tool to produce results in the workplace. Managers must consider this when they are looking to improve performance, however, coaching may be the solution for those who do not have the operational budget to provide financial compensation.

The opposing argument could be made that coaching delivered by managers is a strong rival to financial compensation and rewards because of the strong relationship connection that managers make with their employees to help foster growth and performance. "Organizational systems are built on the faulty assumption that people need to be reinforced, rewarded, or driven to accomplish goals. They underestimate people's basic needs to grow, excel, and contribute" (Fowler, 2014, p.152). The psychological needs of humans run much deeper than monetary wishes do. This is how coaching outcomes provide greater work performance results over financial compensation and rewards. Now that the challenges to coaching have been discussed,

it is important to transition to the methods of coaching delivery as these may play a key role in workplace motivation and performance.

Internal versus External Coaching

In this modern era, many practices are becoming modernized to include coaching. External coaching is relatively new and includes the use of video, phone, and email to provide coaching to employees from a source located outside of the organization. Internal coaching is delivered from within the organization via managers usually utilizing a face-to-face session. In a study conducted by Jones, Woods, and Guillaume (2016), there were notable differences discovered in the outcomes of internal and external coaching approaches. While both techniques were found to be effective, external coaching did not have the level of impact that internal coaching did (Jones, Woods, and Guillaume, 2016, p. 269). Further, Jones, et al., (2016) go on to explain that a possible reason why internal coaching may be more effective is because, “Internal coaches inevitably have a better understanding of the organization’s culture and climate and may therefore be better placed to enable the coachee to be more productive in their specific workplace (i.e., by setting goals in such a way that organization-specific barriers or facilitators to their achievement are realistically discussed, addressed and incorporated into development)” (p. 269). This is not to say that external coaching delivered via phone calls, emails, or video chats does not contribute in a positive way to employee performance and motivation, the results simply do not prove as fruitful as in-person (internal) coaching. Now that internal and external coaching have been explained, it is important turn the conversation to the need for coaching delivered by managers in the workplace.

The Need for Coaching within the Workplace

The results of a study conducted by Theeboom and van Vianen (2014) further proves my theory that coaching is an essential tool that should be applied in the workplace by leaders, “The results show that coaching has significant positive effects on performance and skills, well-being, coping, work attitudes, and goal-directed self-regulation” (pg. 12). Aside from improved employee motivation and increased work performance levels, management coaching provides a basis for staff members to set goals and self-monitor themselves during their evolution toward these goals. This is a significant benefit for organizational leaders as the level of employee commitment deepens, which ultimately benefits the company.

Further, the argument could be made that coaching is not needed in the workplace if the approach applied by the coach is not delivered within ethical standards and utilized in appropriate situations. “It is anticipated that if coaching becomes regulated it will encourage practitioners to behave ethically to ensure that clients are not harmed, nor experience detriment but regulation will only protect those who adhere to the guidelines and will not cover those who chose to practice outside of its range” (Smith, 2015, p.192). More research on this subject will be needed to reveal the exact elements that will negatively impact the coaching experience delivered by managers in the workplace. This is the point at which it becomes prudent to discuss how managers and organizations can acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and training that they need to effectively and ethically implement coaching within the workplace.

International Coach Federation

For organizations and managers who are looking to delve further into coaching, the International Coach Federation or ICF is a great resource to utilize. Established in 1995 by Professional Coach Thomas Leonard, the ICF has grown to include a community of registered coaches whose ultimate goal is to bring coaching into the workplace and empower employees.

The ICF website provides resources for coach training and certification, research on the effects of coaching, statistics of coaching, and much more. “ICF is active in representing all facets of the coaching industry, including Executive, Life Vision and Enhancement, Leadership, Relationship, and Career Coaching. Its 26,000-plus members located in more than 135 countries work toward the common goal of enhancing awareness of coaching, upholding the integrity of the profession, and continually educating themselves with the newest research and practices” (Tripp-Heverin, 2017). As managers and organizations look toward the future, the use of the ICF may be a valid starting point to begin to address employee motivation and performance issues.

Summary

Having reviewed the literature of John Whitmore alongside many current works, it can be concluded that a thorough review regarding the positive effects of coaching has been completed. The literature has revealed that employees perform better and are more motivated when they are coached by their managers. Managers must exercise caution when acting as the coach as this can cause employee demotivation. One of the strongest rivals to coaching is financial incentives and rewards. This must be recognized by the coach and be strategically worked through with the use of goal setting sessions delivered by the manager as coach. When these challenges are recognized and worked through, coaches are able to focus on finding value in their employees, which turns into increased performance and motivation. Upon completion of the literature review, a look into the data collection process will be conducted in the framework for analysis section.

Framework for Analysis

For the purpose of this paper, I conducted a qualitative meta-analysis which included the review of academic textbooks and journal articles. I broke my question, “how does coaching delivered by managers motivate employees and increase work performance” into several parts in order to establish a clear definition of each of its components. My search for literature was centered on using key terms to include coaching, employee motivation, work performance, and Whitmore. By limiting my research to publications within the past five years, this kept the information credible and relevant. The only older source that I chose to use was a text written by Sir John Whitmore as it established a foundation on which to connect past theories with the present. Having reviewed the most pertinent sources to answer my question, the discussion can now begin in order to reveal the findings, shortcomings, and conclusions of this literature review in the discussion and analysis section.

Discussion and Analysis

In an attempt to answer the question, “how does coaching delivered by managers motivate employees and increase work performance”, I have looked at the question from many angles. This literature review has helped to define coaching, managerial coaching, and job performance, and establish a foundation onto which I examined these concepts and how established the relationship is to one another. Through the research process, it has been repeatedly stated how important coaching delivered by managers is to the motivation and performance of employees. Specifically, employees respond well to setting goals and taking active steps to achieve them in the workplace with the guidance of a coach. On an organizational level, coaching has shown to enhance productivity, performance, and morale of staff members. The connection between a manager coach and employee coachee is a crucial one to all parties involved.

The discussion then identified the challenges that managers may face when attempting to deliver coaching to employees to include demotivation and financial compensation and awards have been discussed. Several of the other surprising challenges that managers face is determining when to use coaching practices, practicing caution to not over coach employees, and making time to follow up with their coachees. Further, a look into internal and external coaching practices was taken to determine if any differences existed between the two approaches. One of the differences that was identified included a stronger relationship connection between the coachees and internal coaches, than external coaches because as the coach is a part of the organizational culture and is physically present as a support. External coaching, while considered an effective coaching delivery method, is not as powerful as internal coaching is. The other difference that was present was the lack of performance improvement delivered by

external coaching. Only internal coaching could closely monitor employee productivity and promote increased performance.

Finally, as the discussion transitions from data collection to the conclusions and recommendations, suggestions for organizations and managers are offered to aid in the proper application of coaching in order to achieve optimal results. These suggestions included a step by step action plan for organizations to implement coaching practices and also a look into the ICF as a valuable resource to use during the implementation process was provided to ensure a seamless transition to coaching delivered by managers in the workplace. The above research provides valuable insights into coaching and its benefits while simultaneously affording both organizations and managers an opportunity to utilize coaching resources in anticipation of achieving organizational goals through employees who receive coaching.

Although a large amount of data is available on the topic of coaching promoting work performance and employee motivation, surprisingly, research is lacking with regards to pinpointing exactly which elements of coaching brings the most valuable benefits to the workers, “At this point we do not know which of the programs components are bringing the greatest benefits for the managerial coaching behaviors and which approach would be the most suitable” (David and Matu, p.510). However, this lack of research has not been proven to detract from the benefits of the coaching relationship on the coachee, manager, and organization. At this point it is important to turn the discussion to the conclusion and recommendations in an effort to simplify the coaching process and its application for organizations and also draw final conclusions on coaching delivered by managers and its impact on employees in the workplace.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Proposed Action Plan Based on Research

Now that the literature has been dissected and discussed, a proposed action plan for organizations can be suggested. I have designed a four step process by adapting some similar concepts of Sir John Whitmore's (2009) for managers to utilize in order to anticipate success in the practical application of coaching. The first step I would suggest is to develop an awareness of the need for coaching in the workplace. When employees are not fully engaged in their work, when morale is low, or when the day-to-day workflow is simply not moving at a measurable pace, managers and organizations should look to coaching as a solution. Further, it is important for manager's to realize how the power of setting and achieving goals with employees can lead to a deeper connection to performance and motivation. "The aim of coaching is to aid the achievement of individual goals for improvement, in order to positively contribute to organizational-level goals and objectives" (Jones et al., 2016, p.253). Once the awareness that workplace coaching is needed, the next step can be taken.

The second step organizations should take, once they become aware of the need and effectiveness of coaching, is to conduct research both internally and externally to determine the best approach to coaching implementation. Organizations must determine how much training is required, how much time it will take to train managers, and how much funding is needed to appropriately deliver this service. The ICF is a very helpful resource for organizations to employ in trying to answer the questions above. Once the research has been conducted and the decision has been made to utilize coaching, organizations and managers must begin the practicing coaching.

The third step of the coaching process is the application of coaching in the workplace between the manager and the employees. This is where the manager's training is put to the test.

Organizations must afford managers a specified amount of time to spend with each employee to set goals and develop action plans. While finding the time to coach employees may be challenging, it is necessary. “At all levels of the organizational hierarchy, employees, middle management, and top management are under pressure to achieve higher performance in their respective roles. Our findings suggest that by using coaching, managers can bring about higher role performance by helping their subordinates increase their own job performance” (Pousa and Mathieu, 2014, p.86). Improved productivity for the manager and employees equal major benefits for the organization as a result of coaching and these will be discussed below.

The final component of the organizational approach to coaching is receiving and reviewing the results of coaching. If coaching is correctly applied, the following results can be expected, “The work-based application of improvement and development activity that is encouraged in coaching is likely to promote skill acquisition and enhancement, effectively resulting in skill-based outcomes. In addition, many of the intended benefits of coaching represent affective outcomes, such as the development of self-efficacy and confidence, reduction of stress, and increased satisfaction and motivation” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 254). Coaching delivered by managers is an all-encompassing process. This proves that coaching delivered by managers truly does motivate employees and increase work performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion of this paper, many areas surrounding coaching have been discussed. Based on the literature review and proposed recommendations, it has been revealed that coaching is a valuable and useful tool for organizations, managers, and employees to utilize in an effort to engage managers and employees via the coach-coachee relationship, promote organizational and employee growth, increase work performance levels of employees, and motivate employees.

Although more research is indicated to determine exactly which components of the coach-coachee relationship have the greatest effect on the employee, managers and organizations should utilize the ICF website paired with my four step process discussed above in an effort to begin to realize the great benefits of coaching delivered by managers.

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