

Executive Briefing



The Powerful Act of Coaching Employees

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“Coaching employees provides counsel in real time and clearly identifies goals in the context of the employee’s job.”

Introduction

There are some tasks that we can take care of once a year, like paying taxes or going to the doctor for a checkup. And there are other tasks that we need to perform more often, sometimes even daily. Ensuring superb performance from all of our employees falls into the latter category, especially during times of economic turbulence. Fortunately, managing—or coaching—our employees so that they can perform at the highest levels is more enjoyable than most annual tasks, and it results in increased organizational value.

All organizations are striving to improve employee productivity in order to grow overall business performance and corporate value. But the tool we most often use to improve performance—the performance review—really isn’t capable of helping us reach our overall goal. The reasons for its failure are numerous, but its biggest flaw is that it is the equivalent of looking in the rearview mirror to see where the employee has been—and perhaps failed. Why not look ahead, through the windshield, to see where the employee can successfully go? Additionally, since performance reviews occur once a year, if at all, they require us to look back over a long period of time. Any corrective solutions are too late to do any good.

Here is a helpful idea: Coach early and often. Early, to catch potential problems before they happen. Often, because continuous interest and feedback virtually guarantee better performance. Coaching employees provides counsel in real time and clearly identifies goals in the context of the employee’s job. Good coaches understand the current reality of the employee’s world, and are aware of issues that might prevent a worker from reaching his or her goals. Good coaching provides the development strategies that allow an employee to achieve his or her goals.

How do we get there from here?

How do we make the transition from once-a-year reviews and appraisals to an atmosphere of coaching? First, take a look at today’s annual performance practices and why they aren’t always the best. Then determine the steps necessary to progress in the right direction.

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1. Take steps toward performance coaching



Acknowledge, Institute, Check

First, we have to acknowledge that good performance rarely happens by accident.

This is a hard truth for many people to digest. When we hire someone who has a solid work history, we are likely to let the new employee jump right in to the job with little thought to job training, job coaching skills or job fit. Ninety percent of 1,000 people interviewed last year, including managers and leaders, believe that leaders have little, if any, influence over employee behavior. This is not surprising, given that many leaders often view performance training as unnecessary. No matter what we call it—the performance appraisal, annual evaluation or rating—too many people view performance "training" as a chore they should do once every 365 days, right before giving someone a raise. If they could avoid the appraisal altogether, they would. But benign neglect is not the path to great results.

Second, leaders need to replace the old system with a new one.

Instituting this new system requires examining corporate culture and management strategy. This begins at the top, where cultural changes happen. It starts with the organization's leaders clearly stating what the new system is—essentially defining and describing it—putting the plan in writing and then modeling the behavior. These steps will help managers buy in to the new system, which is necessary if actual changes are to occur.

Third, the new system needs to be checked and rechecked.

If you put a system in place and just expect that everything will be all right, you might be surprised by what is not all right. Busy managers sometimes cut corners, letting certain tasks or deadlines slide. Before long, others are mimicking their behavior. The system you put in place stops working, or never worked at all, because managers are not using it consistently. Always inspect what you expect.

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2. Performance appraisals vs. performance coaching



What is wrong with the performance review and how can we fix it?

Let's take a look at the current system of reviewing employee performance, as well as what's wrong with that system. Typically an annual event, the review is founded on good motives. It stems from a desire to equitably rate employees based on their performance and potential. Managers often use this information to implement consistency. This intent is just fine, but the results often leave much to be desired. An annual performance review fails to produce the same results as performance coaching.

- **Painful comparisons.** Some performance appraisals are comparative, ranking employees against each other based on performance. This encouragement of competition works for some groups some of the time—sales employees, perhaps—but it's time to rethink this approach due to shifting work values, talent shortages and the need for innovation.
- **Lack of consistency.** More and more managers consider performance appraisals a painful process that lacks consistency. They don't like it, so they rush through the appraisal, squeezing what should be a 45-minute session into 5 or 10 minutes, and they often do not say what they mean. At their best, performance appraisals are supposed to give the employee a chance to offer feedback. This does not work if the manager is hurrying to get it over with, or if the employee is too stunned to offer any response.

“The review is founded on good motives...but the results often leave much to be desired.”

Surprise, surprise. The person on the receiving end, hungry for feedback that he or she has not received often—if at all—might discover that the tasks he or she performed weren't the ones the manager wanted done. Or she may discover that she left out an essential step that no one ever told her about. Or that something she had said in a joking manner months ago misled or offended another employee. Performance coaching will help the manager address problems when they occur.

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3. The common threads of coaching and development

	Where it Applies	Keys to Success
Manager Coach	All managers throughout the organization	Strong focus on competencies, training and assessment tools
Assigned Coach	People in transition or sometimes in crisis	Internal education and identification of key problem areas
External Coach	Top leaders, HIPOs, special situations	Selected identification of high value opportunities

Coaching delivers major results

Bersin & Associates, experts in educating organizations about talent management, found that these seven processes ensure the best performance management:

- Goal-setting
- Alignment of performance goals with organizational goals
- Employee self-assessments
- 360-degree assessments
- Manager appraisals
- Competency assessments
- Development planning

Do you see the common threads of coaching and development? Studies show that coaching delivers major results, offering 150 percent greater return on investment than performance appraisals. You read that correctly—150 percent! With that number in mind, coupled with the dread almost everyone feels regarding performance appraisals, why isn't everyone coaching? Perhaps because they are not clear about how or when to do it.

In the performance appraisal process, the manager coaches in order to fix an issue after it has been identified in the appraisal. But what if the system provided for such feedback from the beginning? If we use feedback and development as tools to drive success instead of fixing problems, we have success from the start. It's an easier way to teach and a more positive way to learn. And if such coaching takes place regularly, as it should, and is tailored to the employee and the specific job, it becomes part of the weave of our culture.

It is important for coaches to remember that one size does not fit all. Each employee is different, and employees work differently. The better the manager/coach understands the employee, the more effective the coaching and the results—more engaged and productive employees, and less turnover—will be.

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4. Essential management coaching skills



Help the manager develop coaching skills

How do you transform managers into coaches? As noted earlier, building and changing the corporate culture begins at the top when business leaders adopt a system, define the system and model the system. Top leaders coach managers to be the kind of leaders the organization wants. Two of the management coaching skills include:

- The ability to identify people who fit the job
- The ability to create strategies for employee development that inspire people to perform and achieve

These competencies set the foundation for development, but even the most able manager requires help in these areas. No manager is equipped with essential knowledge about every employee. And successful coaching requires specialized knowledge about:

- Each employee's unique characteristics
- Each employee's attributes in the context of his/her job and in the context of the environment
- Each employee's fit to his/her job, manager and teams

“Building and changing the corporate culture begins at the top when business leaders adopt a system, define the system and model the system.”

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5.1 Five elements of successful coaching: Job Fit

Profile for Behavioral Traits



“The differences between top and average performers come down to more than just experience.”

Job Fit

Knowing the answer to these five essential questions will help leaders understand job fit:

- Does the employee fit in his/her current job?
- What motivates the employee in the job, and how will he or she respond to stressful situations?
- How compatible is the employee with the manager?
- How compatible is the employee with his/her work teams?
- How effective is the employee as a leader?

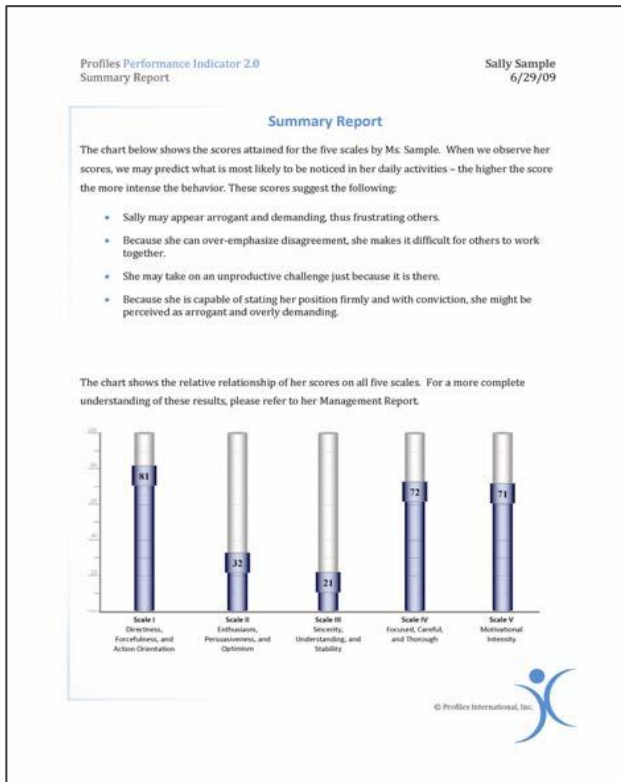
The first key component in knowing the employee—job fit—is best revealed by comparing his or her characteristics against those of known top performers in the role. Try this: List what you know about the employee—let’s call her Sarah—in one column. You will likely list her educational credentials, the companies she has worked for and the different jobs she has performed. Her history may suggest she fits the job. But the differences between top and average performers come down to more than just experience. They include such things as how well she makes decisions and how assertive she is.

If she lacks some of these attributes, and if top performers in the role have them, she is not necessarily a bad fit for the job. But once you identify the gaps, you can also determine where she needs coaching for improved work performance. Managers do not have to pull these attributes from thin air. An assessment analysis provides 20 “top performer” traits to look for in the areas of thinking style, behavioral traits and occupational interests.

Gaps indicate potential “discomfort zones,” meaning that Sarah has the ability to behave in way that the job requires, but doing so may be outside her comfort zone, and this could be stressful for everyone. The role of the coach is to understand where these gaps may occur and to help Sarah bridge those gaps. The job fit assessment also measures thinking style, behavioral traits and occupational interests; compares candidates to job-specific patterns in order to predict future success; and provides a foundation for ongoing employee performance management.

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5.2 Five elements of successful coaching: Motivation



Motivation

A key role of the coach is to help employees sail successfully through company turbulence—like turnover, budget reductions and doing more with fewer people. It's crucial that coaches understand how each employee will react to the everyday "chills and thrills" roller coaster ride at work. Will a discussion about budget cuts in her department send Sarah into a door-slamming fit? If she has to work with a new team on a project that requires her specific capabilities, how will she handle the change?

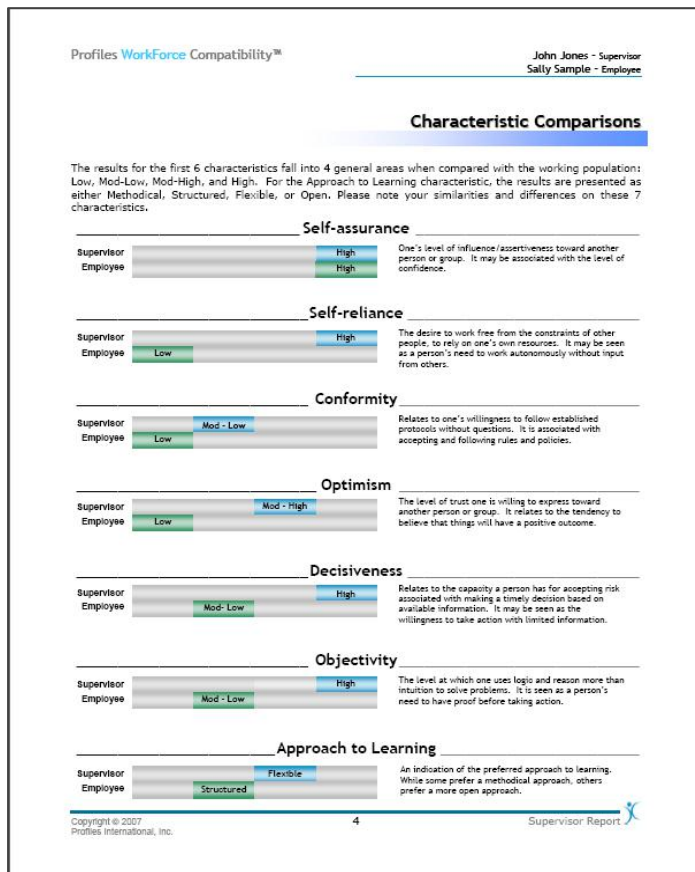
If Sarah handles multiple tasks with ease and is comfortable in a fast-paced environment, she may balk at participating on a team whose leader and other members are more deliberate. Or if she is known for precision and careful decision-making, she might need suggestions on how to fit in an environment in which members finish several projects a week and juggle multiple tasks at one time. A Profiles assessment will measure her:

- Need for control
- Social influence
- Patience and ability to be a team player
- Focus on precision and quality
- Motivational intensity and focus on change

Knowing these things about Sarah will help the manager/coach understand how to motivate her and how she will respond under stress. The coaching report provides specific guidance for increasing performance.

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5.3 Five elements of successful coaching: Chemistry with the Manager



Chemistry with the Manager

So far we have looked at Sarah and what motivates her, but it's just as important to look at how she fits into the larger community. Relationships have an important impact on productivity, and they can create gains for the team and the organization. In order to make the most of these relationships, however, we have to identify potential conflict points in the relationship and understand how to avoid such issues. Knowing what to say and how to say it makes everything else possible.

An assessment provides specific recommendations regarding how the coach and employee can most effectively talk to each other. More specifically, this step:

- Examines the working relationship between employee and manager in order to predict compatibility.
- Identifies similarities and differences in styles and how they may result in conflict.
- Provides specific recommendations for managers and employees so that they can best work together to improve performance.

Many employees quit their jobs due to a bad relationship with their manager or boss. Although there are many situational factors that can cause conflict in any work relationship, there are certain characteristics and behavioral tendencies that, if identified, can be used to enhance relationships, communication and management coaching styles. Assessments provide information that will help each manager understand his or her employees and increase overall productivity.

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5.4 Five elements of successful coaching: Team Chemistry

Team Balance Table					
12 FACTORS	LOW	MOD.LOW	MODERATE	MOD.HIGH	HIGH
Control	●		2, 6, 7, 8	4, 5	3
Social			●, 2	4, 5, 6, 7, 8	3
Patience		2, 4, 5	3, 7, 8	●, 6	
Precision		3, 4, 5	2, 8	●, 6, 7	
Ambition	●	6, 7		2, 4, 5	3, 8
Positive Expectancy		2	6, 7, 8	●, 3, 4, 5	
Composure		2, 3, 4, 5, 8	6, 7	●	
Analytical	3	●, 2, 4, 5	6, 7, 8		
Results Orientation			3, 6, 7	●, 2	4, 5, 8
Emotions		●, 6, 8	3, 4, 5, 7	2	
Team Player		2	3, 4, 5, 6, 8	●, 7	
Quality Orientation	4, 5	3	●, 2, 6, 7, 8		

Note: A shaded area suggests a factor NOT well represented on this team

Chemistry with the Team

Although work teams are often informal groups, they are both ubiquitous and essential to the completion of most projects. Few employees are individual contributors to such projects.

For example, Sarah might come up with a great idea for a sales campaign that involves several departments. This means she will need to present the idea to both her own department head and to other department heads, and she will need help to do so. She might enlist such aid from a team she already works with, or she might need to create a brand new group that can help with research, writing, graphic design, and organizational and speaking skills in order to get the idea ready to be presented.

The team will have its own dynamics, and communication and good attitudes about working together will be critical to its success. All team members will have to buy into Sarah's ideas, so she may need the help of a coach/manager to determine the behavioral and working characteristics of team members, and to identify potential strengths and weaknesses.

Some of the things the coach must know about the team include:

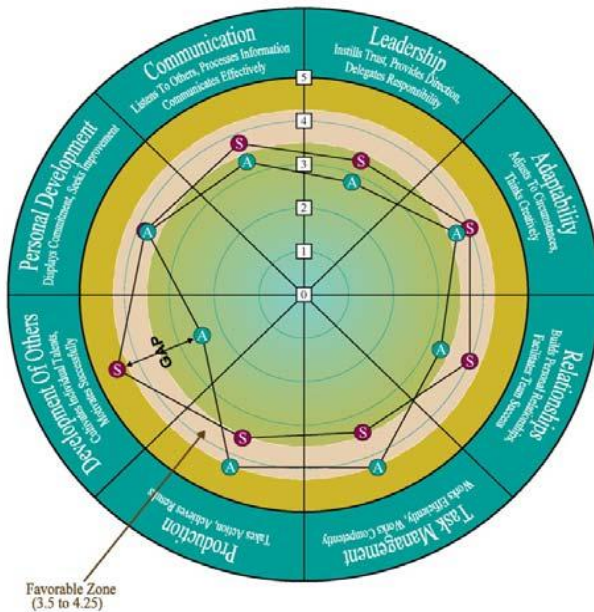
- Are its members—and Sarah—workers who need to be in control?
- What characteristics is the team lacking?
- How do we avoid or resolve potential conflicts?

Knowing these things in advance and putting the right team together will ensure that Sarah's idea is presented well.

The image above shows a Team Balance Report from the Profiles Team Analysis. The Team Balance Report helps managers identify the presence or absence of characteristics that are essential for achieving success as a team.

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5.5 Five elements of successful coaching: Leadership



The image above is a graphic from Profiles' CheckPoint 360° assessment. The chart compares an employee's self-evaluation and his or her co-workers evaluation according to eight different skills.

Leadership Ability

The last step in coaching-based performance management helps determine whether Sarah has leadership ability. To learn this, we examine her through the prism of eight specific leadership competencies and 18 skills. These include:

- **Personal development**—Does she demonstrate commitment and seek improvement?
- **Communication**—How well does she process information and listen to others?
- **Leadership ability**—Does she instill trust, provide direction and delegate responsibility?
- **Adaptability**—How well does she adjust to circumstances? Does she think creatively?
- **Relationship building**—Is she effective at establishing personal relationships and helping her team succeed?
- **Task management**—How efficiently and competently does she work?
- **Production**—Does Sarah act, or does she wait? Does she get results?
- **Development of others**—Does she cultivate the talents of others and successfully motivate them?

Once he has the answers to these questions, the coach will know Sarah well. A report based on the answers will give him specific recommendations and strategies to help him develop her leadership skills. Getting the best performance from employees anytime—during periods of great economic performance or even during downturns—is ultimately the responsibility of the leaders of an organization. Once a manager discovers the value of coaching early and often, he will see how a looking-through-the-windshield approach is far more effective than looking backward at what has gone wrong during the last year. The most effective approach requires:

- Coaching tailored to the individual with the goal of increasing productivity.
- Coaching and development based on insight about the employee's competencies within the context of the job, and working with her team and her manager.

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Summary

Coaching Makes a Difference

Many organizations rely on annual performance evaluations to make important decisions concerning the future of an employee and his or her role in the organization. The evaluation is based on events that happened in the past and is usually standardized across the organization. Important decisions are made in meetings that often last less than half an hour.

There is an alternative to using a performance evaluation that will help increase productivity through consistent feedback and encouragement: coaching. Performance evaluations often look at problems or issues that happened in the past that could have been prevented with coaching. Coaching is a consistent and reliable management style that creates an open line of communication and an opportunity for growth.

Transition from Annual Performance Evaluations to an Atmosphere of Coaching

1. Realize the flawed nature of the performance appraisals
2. Take the steps to get out of your current situation
3. Identify the common threads of coaching and development
4. Learn to identify job fit and specialized knowledge about employees
5. Determine job fit and compatibility with co-workers

Making the transition from performance evaluations to performance coaching can be an uphill battle. Using tool—such as assessments—to help identify behavioral tendencies of employees can help managers learn how to coach well. Coaching not only changes the culture of an organization, but it increases performance and leads to a significant return on investment.

