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Behind Closed Doors

Secrets of Great Management

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Technique:

Guidelines for Effective Coaching

Part of a manager's job is to coach his or her direct reports to increase their capability and effectiveness within the organization. Coaching can focus on either interpersonal skills or technical work that is relevant to the job.

Coaching is different from feedback and from mentoring. As a manager, you are obligated to provide feedback when someone is not performing some aspect of his or her job. Mentoring is a voluntary relationship that works better when there isn't a reporting relationship. Coaching is part of your choice as a manager to help people increase some capability.

Coaching is part of a manager's job, too, but coaching focuses on increasing skills and capability. You may coach someone who has decided to work on a performance issue, or you may coach to develop new skills and insights. In either case, coaching is a helping relationship, so make sure the other person wants your help. Advice inflicted without consent is seldom valued. Unless you can answer "yes" to all the questions in Figure 8.1, refrain from inflicting help.

Questions to ask yourself:	Yes	No
Could this person be more effective if he or she made some changes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the coaching about the technical work or the behaviors related to the job?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does this person want to work on this area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is this person willing to accept your help?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 8.1: Coaching checklist

Guidelines for coaching:

- Make sure you've provided timely and effective feedback.
- Ask whether the person wants coaching or offer to provide helpful information.
- Engage in conversation to articulate how new skills or behaviors would increase effectiveness.
- Discuss additional options, alternatives, or strategies. People usually choose the best alternative they know—but may have a limited repertoire. Coaching helps increase the range of effective options from which to choose. We have found questions like these help people generate options:
 - What problem are you trying to solve?
 - What are the benefits of taking that option?
 - What could go wrong if you take that option?
 - Who else is affected by that option?
 - What alternatives did you consider?
 - What are two other ways to accomplish this goal?
 - How could we make the situation worse?
 - If we could do only one small thing, what would it be?
 - How would an engineer, marketing person, salesperson, or tester (choose a role different from your role) look at this?
 - Where do we get the greatest leverage?
- Discuss the implications of each option. Don't lead to a particular outcome; instead, encourage exploration of each option from the perspective of the person you are coaching. Share your perspective but allow the person you are coaching to select the option that suits his or her needs.
- Develop an action plan.
- Follow up each week in your one-on-one meeting. Recognize successes. Analyze less successful attempts at trying new skills and behaviors. Look for ways to refine and enhance what did work and correct what didn't.

Technique:

Setup for Successful Delegation

You can't do everything by yourself. The time will come when you'll need to delegate managerial or technical tasks to other people. (Don't think of it as shirking your duties; you're providing opportunities to others).

To determine whether a situation is amenable to delegation, begin by asking yourself the questions shown in Figure 8.2, on the following page.

Guidelines

- Choose your delegatee wisely. Select someone who wants to take on more responsibility and who has identified areas of career development where this work would fit. Don't select someone who is not interested in the work you want to delegate.
- Articulate your expectations about the work: what's acceptable when you need it.
- Clarify any unacceptable solutions.
- Define interim milestones. If you've delegated a decision, recognize that a decision has at least two parts: generating alternatives and choosing an alternative. Clarify what part(s) you are delegating, and be explicit if you really want a checkpoint between the two parts.

Questions to ask yourself:	Yes	No
Is it a discrete chunk of work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the person have the skills to do the work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the person have the authority to be successful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the person have the tools necessary to be successful?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the person know what the results should look like?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the person know when the work is due?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you know how often you want this person to report on progress?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does this person know what progress looks like?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is this work too risky to delegate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you set the boundary conditions, e.g. budget, time, and other resources or constraints, for the work?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a format for the work product you want this person to use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 8.2: Delegation checklist