Conversations of Performance Management

Performance Management at Ohio State
The Third Conversation ~ Coaching and Feedback

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Office of Human Resources
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“I know you've heard it a thousand times before. But it's true—hard work pays off. If you want to be good, you have to practice, practice, practice. If you don't love something, then don't do it.”
-Ray Bradbury

In this conversation we will explore coaching as a management style that can help people unlock their potential and enhance their own performance. Coaching can be seen as a delivery system for training and development opportunities that drive towards growth and increased effectiveness.

If you are interested in moving from manager to “coach manager” this conversation can help. A coach manager is an excellent listener and communicator who provides feedback and encouragement while maintaining high expectations. The coach manager seeks to build a working environment in which people can do their best work and motivation is high.
Overview of Coaching and Feedback

The third conversation of the performance management process is the coaching and feedback conversation. The coaching and feedback conversation should start with the employee asking, “How am I doing?”

Feedback is the process of giving and receiving information that is pertinent to the work or task being performed. The goal of this information exchange is to ensure that there is a common agreement of what “good performance” looks like. Feedback provides information about the quantity, quality and characteristics of work and attempts to steer performance in the right direction.

Coaching uses the feedback process to direct and redirect work efforts and behavior. Coaching provides this direction in the context of a relationship wherein the manager attempts to help the employee reach their full potential.

What is Coaching?

The goal of coaching is to align individual development with the department or university’s business needs. In sports, a coach takes the skills and special talents of each player and helps the player apply them in a specific strategy designed to win the game. At Ohio State, coaching means helping employees develop and use his or her unique talents as part of making the university more successful. And just as a good sports coach understands both the player and the game, a good Ohio State coach understands the individual employee, as well as the business of the department and the university.

There are many approaches and strategies you can use in coaching. The one you choose should reflect the employee’s needs and the situation at hand. To help you determine what strategy to use, ask yourself these questions: As a coach do I need to:

- Ask questions to get the employee thinking?
- Clarify expectations?
- Provide direction?
- Give feedback?
- Observe?
- Take a step back and let them run with it?
- Share techniques and knowledge?
- Provide different work experiences?
- Offer training and resources?
- Just listen?
Chapter One – Coaching

*Coaching is a relationship, not an event.* Within this framework, every interaction between a manager and his or her employee provides the manager with a coaching opportunity. By focusing on the relationship instead of specific events, the role a coach plays toward maximizing a performer’s contribution is significantly enhanced.

An effective coach:
1. Guides and facilitates a person towards achieving his or her potential
2. Encourages his/her personal and professional growth
3. Increases an employee’s long-term commitment to the organization
4. Assesses an employee’s competence and confidence levels
5. Guides employees in discovering and applying his or her knowledge and skills
6. Guides the employee in discovering and addressing performance development opportunities
7. Guides the employee in exploring root causes of performance problems
8. Recognizes and celebrates employee contributions and performance
9. Removes barriers and provides resources
10. Challenges the performer to push beyond their comfort zone
11. Facilitates employee self-management

The key responsibility of the coach is to develop a deep understanding of the person he or she is coaching and then, based upon that understanding, adjust his or her actions to guide the employee toward achieving his or her greatest potential and achieving maximum positive impact on the department and university.

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Coaching can be a conversation:
- Between a supervisor and an employee
- Among colleagues or peers and
- From an employee to a supervisor
Coaching Roles

The eleven coaching responsibilities outlined on page 5, translate into the five coaching roles listed below. Coaches play different roles depending on the situation, task and the performer.

**Aligning**: Ensuring that the right tasks are being done, the targets and priorities are clear and the work correlates effectively with that of the unit and the university. The primary focus of this role is to direct the performer toward achieving the desired outcomes.

**Motivating/Inspiring**: Helping the performer become self-motivated and inspired by the work itself and the opportunities for success. The primary focus of this role is to help the performer discover what he or she finds rewarding about the work and its outcomes and challenge them to put their best efforts forward.

**Supporting**: Providing organizational, professional, and emotional support to the performer to build his or her self-confidence. The primary focus of this role is to help the performer gain confidence in his or her abilities and provide encouragement.

**Developing**: Challenging the performer to learn, grow, take risks, change, and leap out of his or her performance “comfort zone.” The primary focus of this role is to encourage and help the performer to develop the knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies, and healthy outlook needed now and in the future.

**Problem Solving**: Guide the performer in discovering solutions to complex problems by posing powerful questions and challenges to the performer’s usual way of thinking. The primary focus of this role is to help the performer master the art of problem solving.

Selecting the Best Coaching Role

Do you know what your individual employees need from you? Place an x on the line for each of the five coaching roles that best describes your performer’s observed behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching Role</th>
<th>The Performer…</th>
<th>Needs More of this</th>
<th>Needs Less of this</th>
<th>The Performer…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aligning</td>
<td>Needs hands-on direction, guidance, alignment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Needs little direction and guidance. Very self-directed and sees the line of sight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating/Inspiring</td>
<td>Lacks interests in or energy for the job; no initiative.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brings energy and enthusiasm to the task. Self-starter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Displays comfort with status quo. Good but not great performer.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Is always challenging his or her past performance levels. An active learner and experimenter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Appears unable to solve challenging problems. No learning from mistakes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Looks for root causes of problems; is skilled at systems thinking and looking outside the box.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Two – Giving Feedback that Makes a Difference

Feedback is information about an observed behavior that can be either appreciation or constructive. It’s like holding a mirror up to your employee so he or she can see what impact a specific behavior is having, and (in the case of constructive feedback) when a change in behavior will lead to better results. Employees want to hear how they are doing and providing them with regular coaching and feedback will keep employees engaged and motivated and can increase their job satisfaction.

Appreciative feedback is probably the simplest method of motivating employees. But the feedback only valuable if it’s specific. Managers need to let their employees know specifically what they are doing well. The best feedback is specific, focused on behavior rather than personality or character trait and is based on observations.

Constructive feedback is feedback on how to improve and is just as important as appreciative feedback. Most everyone wants to know how to be more effective.

Remember constructive feedback is not criticism. Critic means to judge value while construct means to build up. Criticism generally comes in the form of “here’s what you’ve done wrong” while constructive feedback comes in the form of “here’s how you can do better next time.”

Similar to coaching, feedback should be part of your day-to-day interaction with employees. Give feedback whenever an employee:

- Does something that is particularly “right.”
- Seems to be doing something that is not quite “right” given the performance objectives and goals you’ve established.
- Does something that has an impact – positive or negative – on others.
- Could be doing something different to create greater or more positive impact.

“Work is too much a part of life not to recognize moments of achievement.
Grab as many as you can.
Make a big deal out of them.”

- Jack Welch
The Gift

Feedback has been called a “gift” because it really does help the person who’s receiving it. You can make your feedback an act of giving by taking these steps:

Before Giving the Feedback

- Clarify your purpose – Ask yourself, why am I giving this feedback – what’s my purpose? The best feedback is given to help an employee be more successful and contribute more. Is the purpose: to encourage continued performance, to improve performance, to correct performance or to develop a new skill? Define as clearly as possible what the employee will gain by listening to your feedback.
- Take into consideration the employee’s developmental stage. Are they: a new hire or new to a task, moderately experienced or a consistent performer? The less developed an employee is, the more frequently feedback is needed.
- Tailor the message – Some people need lots of details and 1-2 examples others want a one-sentence statement of the issue. Some want time to think about feedback before responding; others want to sit down and work through the issue on the spot.

When Delivering the Feedback

- First, present “this is what I experienced.” – To frame the feedback in terms of what you experienced, try using “I” statements. Be as specific as you can in describing what you observed or the results. Describe the impact of the individual’s behavior – without judgment. For example, “When you’re late, others have to cover your phone” instead of “Being late is inconsiderate.” Another example might be, “I saw your presentation yesterday and I thought your facilitation skills were excellent. You were prepared, focused, engaging and able to answer participant’s questions.” Focus on the actions and behaviors, not the person.
- Check for understanding – Pause and allow the person to react.
- Present “This is what I feel.” Again, use “I” statements and be as clear and direct as possible. For example, “I’m concerned that others are growing frustrated…” or “I feel disappointed…” or “I am excited to see how you’ve grown as a facilitator.”
- Pause for understanding – Again give the employee some time to react.
- Finally, present “this is what I need.” – Define what you want – the desired outcomes. With the employee, talk through alternative solutions. Together, agree on action.
- Follow up after the conversation. Did the coaching session(s) achieve the desired result(s)?
- Acknowledge and reward successful coaching results. Celebrate successes, progress and achievement.
Giving Informed Feedback
The feedback conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Works</th>
<th>What Doesn’t Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Giving both appreciative and constructive feedback.</td>
<td>• Forgetting that “feedback” is positive, as well as constructive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving frequent feedback.</td>
<td>• Saving the feedback until something significant warrants a discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing the feedback as close to the event as possible</td>
<td>• Waiting until the situation is past so the discussion will be less emotional.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Making feedback specific and using clear, recent examples:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Thank you for getting me that report on time. I was able to review it,</td>
<td>• Making general statements that aren’t supported by specifics:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>add some pieces and send it to the leadership team prior to their</td>
<td>“Thanks.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly meeting.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Giving only as much feedback as the employee can handle.</td>
<td>• Saving your comments until you’re so frustrated you just have to speak up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focusing on the behavior rather than the employee.</td>
<td>• Focusing on the person or making judgments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example:</td>
<td>For example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’d like to discuss some of the quality problems we had on our last</td>
<td>“I just can’t rely on you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Looking ahead to ways of solving the problem:</td>
<td>• Looking back and rehashing the problem:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“What can we do to help you feel more comfortable with the more</td>
<td>“We’ve talked about this before – why do you keep making the same mistakes?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult aspects of coding?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Convey your feedback with good intentions.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensure the timing and the circumstances are appropriate.</td>
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</table>
Practice!
In the spaces below, turn the following feedback statements into effective feedback.

**Descriptive** - Give an accurate description of the behavior you are talking about and about what you would like to see instead.

That presentation just isn't working for me. You aren't very creative, are you.

Don't judge or label the person. Don't assume you know what they think. Don't be vague.

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**Specific** - Be clear about the aspect of the person’s performance or behavior that you want to discuss. The best way to ensure repeated effective behavior is to be specific.

By the way Larry, you did a pretty good job of running the meeting last week.

This does not let the person know what was good about their performance and will not help guarantee a repeat of the behavior in the future.
Ask for Feedback!

Remember that feedback is a gift. If we can think of feedback in this context, we might all be more open to asking for and receiving feedback. Feedback and coaching, like all other aspects of managing, is a dialogue in which both sides have something to say and both sides need to listen. Here are some suggestions:

- Ask for feedback from a variety of employees – those with whom you have very successful communication and trust, and those with who you’re not as comfortable.
- If you are interested in feedback on a specific skill or situation, ask for it directly.
- Ask for feedback informally at the end of a meeting or project.
- Listen to both appreciative and constructive feedback with an open mind. Even if you disagree with it, you can learn about the perception you’re creating and use the feedback to help you make a greater or more positive impact – even if just on one individual.
- When a manager provides feedback to an employee, it’s also a great time to for the manager to ask for feedback on their performance and what they can do better or differently to help the employee.
Chapter Three – Receiving Feedback

Why don’t people like to receive feedback? Feedback unfortunately seems to have a negative connotation. People automatically assume when they receive feedback that it’s going to be constructive. But don’t forget that feedback is appreciative and constructive and when given and received appropriately helps someone reach their full potential.

Feedback is worth listening to with active, full attention. Hearing feedback can:

- Help you become aware of how you are doing – what’s working and what isn’t
- Give you some ideas to help you plan your own development, in order to reach your full potential
- Give you a “reality check” – you can compare how you think you are doing with what other people tell you

Tips for effectively receiving feedback:

- Relax tense muscles and watch your body language.
- Listen carefully – paraphrase to make sure you heard the message correctly. This also demonstrates to the other person that you are sincere in wanting to hear his or her feedback.
- Ask for examples – direct the conversation by saying, “Tell me more” or “What have I specifically done to make you feel that way?”
- Acknowledge – you don’t have to agree or disagree with the person at this time. It’s appropriate to recognize the other person’s input by saying “You’ve given me something to think about.”
- Think objectively – evaluate the feedback. Ask yourself; if the feedback is valid and important; if you’ve heard it from someone else; are the person’s standards and expectations valid; is the feedback really about me or is it about the other person?
- Think about what you are going to do with the feedback – you don’t have to act upon the feedback right away. Spend some time thinking about the feedback and then determine what action, if any, you need to take.
Chapter Four – The Conversation

Successful coaches encourage, support and offer guidance. Above all, they are patient and are trustworthy listeners. They take a genuine interest in the people they are coaching and ask lots of questions that are tailored to each individual’s particular situation.

Are you a great coach?

- Are you a good listener?
- Are you patient with people who know less than you?
- Do you know what each of your employees does best? What each needs to focus on?
- Are you interested in seeing other people succeed and do even better in their jobs?
- Do you make time regularly for coaching session with people you manage?
- Are you comfortable delivering praise as well as constructive suggestions/feedback?
- Are you open to feedback from your direct reports?

Managers and employees should engage in coaching and feedback conversations together. While “coachable” moments occur every day – moments that offer opportunities for praise and learning, at least two formal coaching conversations should happen during the performance year. Both parties should bring their thoughts, ideas and questions to each conversation. Together, use this time as an opportunity to listen, share and guide.

Consider using these questions during your coaching meetings:

- How can I support you?
- What progress have you made on your goals?
- What barriers prevent you from accomplishing your goals?
- What has been a recent success? How did that work? How did you do you feel about it?
- What new opportunities would you like to mention?
- What decisions do you need to make?
- What kind of feedback would be helpful right now?
- What is the most important thing you and I should talk about?
- Is there anything I’ve said that isn’t clear? Was this helpful?
Questions for a particular situation

- How do you think the project is going?
- Would you say more about that?
- What has worked well for you on this project? Why?
- What do you see as the goal of this project? Has the goal changed since you started?
- How will we measure the success of this project?
- What are other choices? What options do you have?
- What do you see as next steps?
- What have you learned so far?
- What are you committed to?
- When can I follow-up with you?

Questions for employees

- Am I clear on what's expected of me?
- In what areas do I believe I'm exceeding expectations? How do I want to share this with my manager? Are there specific examples of my successes I want to share?
- In what areas do I believe I'm meeting expectations? Is there anything I need in order to do better in these areas e.g., training, resources, support, etc.
- In what areas do I believe my performance is below expectations? Why am I not meeting expectations? What do I need to improve my performance?
- Do I know the extent to which my manager is satisfied with my job performance?
- How can I share with my manager what I am working on? Project updates?
- How well am I meeting my goals? What help do I need to assure my goals are met?
- Is there information I need to share with my supervisor about barriers to my job performance, such as: workload, unclear directions, lack of skill or knowledge, etc.
- Is there training that would help me improve my performance?
- Are there additional tasks or responsibilities I would like to learn?
- What feedback do I want to give my supervisor about his/her coaching?
Sometimes a coaching and feedback conversation doesn’t go exactly as planned. Below are some tips for handling employee behaviors:

**If the employee becomes defensive or makes excuses:**
- Listen to what the employee has to say and paraphrase back. Remain neutral. Maintain eye contact.
- Don’t solve the problem.
- Ask for specifics with open-ended questions like, “Would you say more about that?”
- Try to determine the cause with phrases like, “Tell me more”, “How did you reach that conclusion?”
- Ask how the employee will resolve the problem.

**If the employee becomes angry or upset:**
- Stay calm and centered. Maintain eye contact.
- Listen to what the employee has to say and paraphrase back.
- Let the employee “vent” for as long as they need to until they can listen to you.
- Avoid arguments.
- Bring discussion and focus back to performance and standards with statements like, “I hear you but here is what I need you to understand.”
- Take a break from the situation. Agree to come back in 5 minutes, 5 hours or whatever timeframe seems most appropriate given the individual and the situation.
- Say the employee’s name and ask open-ended questions.

**If the employee is unresponsive or withdrawn:**
- Be patient and friendly.
- Show genuine concern.
- Stay silent and wait for the employee to say something.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Encourage the employee by letting them know that you want to hear his/her input and that their input is important.
Summary

- Coaching involves a coach who cares very deeply about the welfare and success of another person.
- Coaches come in many forms and play a number of different roles in our lives.
- An effective coach uses a wide variety of behaviors to challenge, support, encourage, enable, guide, and shape the thoughts and actions of the person being coached.
- The aim of the coach is to be there when needed, even if not wanted, but also to know when it’s time for the person being coached to step out on his or her own.
- People learn from trying and from making mistakes. We want a culture where employees feel free to try things, make mistakes, learn and move on.
- Employees may use methods that are different from yours, but they may be just as effective. Coaches must keep an open mind and be flexible.
- Gather and consider all the facts before giving constructive feedback.
- LISTEN and BE CURIOUS!
- When providing someone feedback, don’t use words like always, never and worst.
- Never forget the value of offering genuine, sincere appreciative feedback and coaching!