

The Power of Coaching

BY LOUIS L. MARINES



As a place for contagious learning, the classroom is essential to education. Yet lessons learned in the classroom need to be tested, applied, and adapted by each of us

when we bring them to the workplace. Some lessons are best acquired in the workplace itself, but these too need to see practical use to be worthwhile. And to transfer classroom learning to the real world or to optimize on-the-job learning, nothing beats effective coaching.

Effective leaders ensure that key professionals have access to and benefit from a coach's support. Leaders also ensure that the coach's interpersonal art is supported by the framework of an effective process, beginning with clear objectives. Such objectives may include:

- Providing feedback (the truth) about performance;
- Transferring specific knowledge and skills;
- Behavioral improvements;
- Ensuring natural motivation;
- Promoting persistence; and
- Fostering independence.

These objectives must serve the firm's goals of optimized economic performance in the near future and stable economic value in the long term. Coaching helps advance highly qualified successor managers at all levels for the firm's next leadership generations. This is the leader's stewardship responsibility: to provide for the firm's success over time.

Given an essential character, leaders can be made as well as born; likewise, coaches may themselves be coached into effectiveness. In my work as a coach and a coach trainer, I have developed guidelines that elevate opportunities for success.

For the executive who assigns coaches:

- Make sure that people selected for coaching want to be coached, are

enthusiastic about learning, and respect the professional who will be their coach.

- Similarly, the coach must want to be in this relationship, care about the performance of the people being coached, and have a stake in their success.
- Make clear how coaching relates to the firm's business and strategies so that the development effort has context and purpose and helps create value.

For the coach:

- Find out what the coached person wants in terms of career (satisfaction, challenge, rewards, influence, power?).
- Identify ways to build on the coached person's strengths as well as filling knowledge or experience gaps. The whole person is being developed.
- Be helpful, supportive, and compassionate, not cynical, sarcastic, or judgmental. It is difficult enough for many coached professionals to admit not knowing something and to ask for help.
- Use silence, intense listening, curiosity, and thoughtful questions to elicit real needs and help your charge discover what he or she may already know but is not consciously aware of.
- Tell the truth tactfully but clearly. Not many professionals are told the truth about how they are doing, and the truth is essential as a basis for learning and change.
- Let go of the coached person's past behaviors that preceded your coaching involvement. What is important is to focus on the better future and how to get there.
- Improve yourself visibly so you are a role model for those you coach. Be noticeable about your efforts to become more effective.

A well-designed approach to the coaching process makes the firm's investment more valuable. This approach will:

- Assess people's readiness for and

interest in being coached.

- Discuss the areas where they want help and where you see they need help, and seek understanding and agreement.
- Define the desired new knowledge and behaviors.
- Set broader goals for knowledge but specific goals for behavior, as behavior is often very difficult to change.
- To achieve these aims, you may want to get your peers' input. How do others see the needs of the people being coached? What help are they willing and able to offer?
- Create the coaching plan: What participants will do and when, what resources (classes, job assignments, books, other professionals) they will use, and what you, as the coach, commit to do, when, and how.
- Set the follow-up process: When and how will you check on progress and update the plan?

Since the professions' first expression in the guilds of the Renaissance, when the apprenticeship model flourished, the best coaches have been great listeners, provocative questioners, and effective role models. When we are open to and eager for learning and truthful about our own experiences, we invite trust—a very helpful ingredient in the coaching relationship.

Many firms leave economic value on the table every day because they inadequately develop and employ the human capital they have expensively acquired. In the less forgiving AEC marketplace of today and tomorrow, such inattention can be fatal to the enterprise. The war for talent will have fewer battles and more victories when we tackle its companion challenge—the war to honor the talent we already have.

Louis L. Marines is the founder of the Advanced Management Institute for Architecture and Engineering. This article is an excerpt from Marines' latest book, The Language of Leadership.

