

Don't Write Off the Coaching Leadership Style - Daniel Goleman

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Coaching leaders help employees identify their unique strengths and weaknesses and tie them to their personal and career aspirations. They encourage employees to establish long-term development goals and help them conceptualize a plan for attaining them. They make agreements with their employees about their role and responsibilities in enacting development plans, and they give plentiful instruction and feedback.

Coaching leaders excel at delegating; they give employees challenging assignments, even if that means the tasks won't be accomplished quickly. In other words, these leaders are willing to put up with short-term failure if it furthers long-term learning.

Not surprising, the coaching style is used least often in our high-pressure economy. Many leaders say they don't have the time for the slow and tedious work of teaching people and helping them grow. But after a first session, it takes little or no extra time. Leaders who ignore this style are passing up a powerful tool: its impact on climate and performance are markedly positive.

Admittedly, there is a paradox in the positive effect on business performance because coaching focuses primarily on personal development, not on immediate work-related tasks. Even so, coaching improves results. The reason: it requires constant dialogue, and that dialogue has a way of pushing up every driver of climate. Take flexibility. When an employee knows his boss watches him and cares about what he does, he feels free to experiment. After all, he's sure to get quick and constructive feedback.

Similarly, the ongoing dialogue of coaching guarantees that people know what is expected of them and how their work fits into a larger vision or strategy. That affects responsibility and clarity. As for commitment, coaching helps there, too, because the style's implicit message is, "I believe in you, I'm investing in you, and I expect your best efforts." Employees very often rise to that challenge.

The coaching style works well in many business situations, but it is perhaps most effective when people on the receiving end are "up for it." For instance, the coaching style works particularly well when employees are already aware of their weaknesses and would like to improve their performance. Similarly, the style works well when employees realize how cultivating new abilities can help them advance.

By contrast, the coaching style makes little sense when employees, for whatever reason, are resistant to learning or changing their ways. And it flops if the leader lacks the expertise to help the employee along. The fact is, many

managers are unfamiliar with or simply inept at coaching, particularly when it comes to giving ongoing performance feedback that motivates rather than creates fear or apathy.

Some companies have realized the positive impact of the style and are trying to make it a core competence. At some organizations, a significant portion of annual bonuses is tied to an executive's development of his or her direct reports. But many organizations have yet to take full advantage of this leadership style.

Although the coaching style may not scream "bottom-line results," it delivers them.

Learn more about applying different leadership styles in my upcoming digital audiobook **Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence – Selected Writings**. The print edition is available now from More Than Sound.

Daniel Goleman's upcoming book FOCUS: The Hidden Driver of Excellence and CD Cultivating Focus: Techniques for Excellence are now available for pre-order (publication date is October 8).

His more recent books are The Brain and Emotional Intelligence: New Insights and Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence – Selected Writings (More Than Sound).

Leadership: A Master Class is Goleman's first-ever comprehensive video series that examines the best practices of top-performing executives.