

# Coaching your employees

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One of the most important jobs of a business owner is to train and coach the store's employees so that they become more effective and increase their skills and their contribution. A good job of coaching is critical to managing your employees. This requires that you direct employees by influencing them as opposed to controlling them.

A good coach will be able to boost morale and productivity by making the employees feel empowered, and by creating the feeling of pride and ownership in their work.

One of the most important elements of a good coach is to use questions and also to have great listening skills (not much different than the fundamentals of retail selling). Being an effective listener is an art. Be sure to have a dialogue and not a monologue with your employee. Use your ears and your mouth in the right proportion, at least 2/3 of the time listening and 1/3 or less of the time talking.

It is not easy to be a good coach in that there are many skills required in order to effectively coach employees. Here are some of the skills that a successful coach will have:

- Know and communicate the mission, values, and culture of your store.
- Serve as a role model and lead by example
- Be sincere in your desire to grow your employees
- Develop a relationship with your employees where they are not afraid to talk about their failures and concerns and are willing to openly offer ideas
- Be trustworthy and respectful of your employees
- Set clear objectives, and give open and honest feedback regularly, whether positive or negative. Let them know how their efforts will be measured.
- Show empathy and be able to relate to what they are experiencing. Share your past struggles and failures, and how you overcame them.
- Talk with them, not at them
- Allow the employee to grow and develop without fear of failure affecting their status
- Constantly communicate ways to improve, and show them, or better yet develop with them, a plan for achieving that improvement

The most important component of successful coaching is communication. You need to have the ability to pass on knowledge, information, and decision making skills so the employee can successfully carry out your directives. Ultimately the main objective is to get employees to solve problems on their own.

With regard to a good coaching session, there are several things you can do to assure a positive meeting:

- Have a specific time and length for the session, and don't allow any interruptions.

- Have an agenda, define and get the employee's agreement on the topic to be covered.
- Ask questions to find out how much the employee already knows about the topic.
- Be the best listener you can be, don't interrupt the employee when they are talking
- Be positive, let the employee know you believe in him
- Have the employee repeat what he has learned so you are sure he understood what you were teaching
- After the session is over, take time to observe critique and give feedback on how the employee is progressing
- Give recognition when the employee reaches the goal or objective.
- Agree on a next-step plan to practice and follow up on continuing improvement.

Be patient when coaching. What is obvious to you is not necessarily obvious to the employee. Learn to ask rather than tell. Also keep in mind that you need to take a good look at yourself. Remember that when you undertake coaching, you will be developing and improving your skills as well. Just like your employees, who must learn on the job, you will learn as well. Good coaches develop over a period of time. The learning goes both ways.

*Questions, comments, and feedback are always welcome.*

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