



4 STEPS TO DELIVERING EFFECTIVE COACHING & FEEDBACK

Advice from ourCHRO - White Paper Series

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*Coaching & feedback
are key to building high-
performing teams*

INTRODUCTION

I've been fortunate in my career to have worked with many great leaders, participated in tremendously insightful executive training sessions, and benefited from the knowledge of strong mentors and sponsors. I've taken a little something from each of those experiences and sprinkled in some of my own learnings. The result is a four-step approach to coaching and feedback which has helped me to build several high-performing, fully engaged teams in a number of different organizations and industries. This White Paper provides a brief overview of that approach and includes tips for managers who want to become more effective coaches.



Bryan L. Olson
FOUNDER & MANAGING PARTNER



Your short-term team of HR experts

The ourCHRO team has substantial experience helping leaders across multiple industries skillfully manage through M&A, turnarounds, restructurings, leadership changes, and other types of company transitions.

WHAT IS COACHING & FEEDBACK

First, coaching and feedback can mean many different things, so let's briefly define them. Coaching is a method of leading, directing, instructing and training a person, with the aim of improving performance, achieving specific goals or developing specific skills. Feedback is the sharing of information in terms of the performance that is expected from and the performance that was exhibited by an employee. Both are important and managers should provide both coaching and feedback to each of their direct reports on a regular basis. Now, let's move on to the four steps.

STEP 1:

*Make sure you
have a sufficient
relationship*

You can only effectively coach someone with whom you have a sufficient relationship. Coaching can only effectively be given and received when the relationship between the parties is built on trust. Said another way, a person can only effectively hear the coaching if they believe that it is being given with their best interests and personal development in mind. That's what I mean by having a "sufficient" relationship - that when you deliver the coaching it is perceived by the recipient that you are doing it because you care about them and their development.

Personally, I invest significant time in building relationships at work. I've found that it helps me to be effective in many aspects of my job, but that it's particularly helpful when it comes to coaching. I rarely provide coaching in cases where a sufficient relationship hasn't yet been established. I will often go so far as to explain the concept and then ask the potential coaching recipient whether we are at a point in our relationship where coaching and feedback would be appreciated. I tell them that it's fine if we are not there yet and that I appreciate it when people are honest enough to acknowledge when we are not. Simply having these types of genuine conversations can help to deepen relationships.

**INVEST IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PEOPLE
YOU ARE COACHING. IF YOU DON'T, YOU WILL BE LIMITED IN
YOUR EFFECTIVENESS AS A COACH.**



When many managers think about coaching, they often envision themselves telling an employee about what they need to do better. Making sure that employees know what's expected of them and making them aware when they are falling short of those expectations is indeed part of what good managers need to do. That helps team members to avoid failure.

It's important that this type of feedback be provided based on more than a single data point that has come to the manager's attention. If a manager provides feedback for improvement every time they learn of something that may need to be improved, they run the risk of coaching based on impressions that aren't founded on facts or reality.

STEP 2:
Coach to weaknesses, which helps to avoid failure

COACH TO WEAKNESSES WHEN:

- **YOU HAVE MULTIPLE DATA POINTS**
- **YOU HAVE WITNESSED THE BEHAVIOR PERSONALLY, OR**
- **YOUR BOSS TOLD YOU TO DO SO**

It is important to coach to weaknesses whenever you have enough data to know that an employee is not meeting your performance expectations (such as when you have multiple examples of the employee falling short). You should be sharing this feedback in a timely manner. A weakness mentioned in an annual review should never be a surprise.

So how do you best coach to weaknesses? Simply put, do it as soon as possible after the event or events which led to the need to coach, and use specific examples whenever possible. Be direct, but not unkind. Make sure that the employee understands the feedback, and work with them to figure out ways to improve.

STEP 3:

*Coach to strengths,
which leads to
success*

While coaching to weakness helps to avoid failure, reinforcing and developing the areas where an employee is already strong leads to success and their increased engagement. Teams tend to be most effective when they are comprised of talented people working at what they do best. Identifying the strengths of your team members and then reinforcing and developing those strengths will lead to their success.

When you are coaching to strengths, be sure to be genuine. Only give a compliment if you truly mean it and make sure that your body language reinforces what your words are saying. In other words, don't discount the message by unintentionally using negative micro messages (such as not making eye contact, or typing an e-mail while you are giving positive feedback over the phone).

COACH TO STRENGTHS FREQUENTLY.

DO IT WHENEVER YOU WITNESS SOMETHING DONE PARTICULARLY WELL.

You can only effectively develop others if you are first developing yourself. Everyone needs to find the best way to develop themselves. For me, one of the most important components of my personal and professional development is what I refer to as my quarterly introspection days.

Four times per year I take a day for myself where I work through my thoughts and decisions with respect to the things that are most important in my life (e.g. my relationships, career, hobbies, financial planning, etc.). I spend time exploring what's working well, where I can improve, and how I can better allocate my time. I find that this exercise helps keep me balanced and focused on the things that are most important in my life. It puts me in a better position to coach and develop others.

STEP 4:
*Develop
yourself so that
you can
effectively
develop others*

A few ways you could develop yourself include:

- Working with a career coach
- Obtaining 360 degree feedback
- Introspection
- Developing or maintaining your personal brand
- Creating your own personal development plan
- Finding or becoming a mentor
- Making sure to have balance in your life



The Important Role of “Managers of Managers”

Managers of managers have an additional role to play. They are in the best position to create an environment of coaching and feedback. They should hold their managers accountable for developing each of their team members. One of the simplest ways to ensure this is happening is to schedule recurring check-in meetings with each of your managers where the agenda is entirely focused on discussion of each team members’ development and progress.

I have also found it helpful to conduct skip level meetings. When leading a large organization, I meet one-on-one with each member of my broader team. In advance of each meeting I request that the employee complete a form and send it to me. The form asks questions such as: “On a scale of 1 to 10, how busy are you? Using any scale you like, how fulfilled are you in your current job? What assignments, training or development opportunities will be your focus in the coming year? From a longer-term perspective, what do you see yourself doing in your career?” We don’t go through every answer during the meeting, but asking employees to give thoughtful consideration to these questions and submit their answers in advance tends to lead to very productive developmental discussions. At times I have held as many as 100 of these sessions in a year. It was a significant investment of time, but the returns on that investment were substantial. My team members were more engaged when they knew that I am focused on their growth and development and I was in a better position to lead because I had a much more informed view of the challenges and opportunities of each of their roles.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Olson has over 30 years of professional experience, more than 15 of which is as senior executive in Human Resources at several leading global companies. He has supported more than 50 corporate M&A transactions as either an HR leader or HR M&A attorney. These deals ranged in transaction size from under 5 million to over 10 billion dollars.

In addition, Bryan has significant experience leading executive teams through corporate turnarounds, leadership changes, and other company transitions. He is currently serving on a part-time contractor basis as the Chief Human Resources Officer of publicly-traded The Cannabist Company, where he is helping its senior leadership team reshape the business. Bryan is the former CHRO of global law firm K&L Gates, where he was awarded an HR Hero Award by a national HR organization for bringing the best of HR from the corporate world to a major law firm.

Bryan previously held senior HR executive positions at Aetna and United Technologies Corporation (both in the top 50 of the Fortune list at the time). Bryan is a former practicing employee benefits and executive compensation attorney at one of the top global law firms, Skadden Arps. He started his career at Fidelity Investments. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Business from Westminster College and a Juris Doctorate from Boston College Law School.

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