Use Coaching to Improve Employee Performance

Use 6 Steps to Coach Employees to Help Improve their Work Performance

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The First Step in Coaching an Employee

The first step in any effort to [improve employee performance](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/performance-improvement-strategies-1918714) is [counseling or coaching](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/tips-for-effective-coaching-1917836). Counseling or coaching is part of the day-to-day interaction between a supervisor and an employee who reports to her, or an HR professional and [line managers](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-does-a-manager-do-in-the-workplace-1919121).

Coaching often provides [positive feedback about employee contributions](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/provide-feedback-that-has-an-impact-1916642). Employees need to know when they are effective contributors.

By providing this positive feedback, you are also letting the employee know the actions and contributions that you'd like to reinforce so that you see more of them.

Coaching When Performance Issues Exist

At the same time, regular coaching brings [performance issues](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-progressive-discipline-1918092) to an employee's attention when they are minor. Your [coaching feedback assists the employee](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-give-feedback-2275933) to correct these issues before they become significant detractions from her performance.

The [goal of performance coaching](https://www.thebalance.com/how-ach-payments-work-315441) is not to make the employee feel bad, nor is it provided to show how much the HR professional or manager know. The goal of coaching is to work with the employee to solve performance problems and to improve the work of the employee, the team, and the department.

Employees who respond positively to coaching and improve their performance can become valued contributors to the success of the business. Employees who fail to improve will find themselves placed on a formal [performance improvement plan, known as a PIP](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/performance-improvement-plan-contents-and-sample-form-1918850). This sets up a formal process wherein the manager meets regularly with the underperforming employee to provide coaching and feedback.

At the meetings, they also evaluate how well the employee is performing in [achieving the performance goals](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/is-a-pip-the-first-step-in-firing-an-employee-3980663) that were enumerated in the PIP. Generally, by the time an employee has received a PIP, Human Resources staff are significantly involved in both the meetings and in the review of the employee's progress and performance.

Employees who fail to improve [when on the PIP](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/dealing-with-pip-1917828) are likely to [find their employment terminated](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-causes-employment-termination-1918275).

Second Example of Performance Coaching

In a second example of the use of performance coaching, managers can use performance coaching to help employees who are effective contributors improve and become even more effective contributors. Done well, coaching can help an employee continuously improve their skills, experience, and ability to contribute.

From years of observing managers coaching, the time managers spend in [performance coaching with their best](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-great-managers-do-differently-1918652), most contributing employees, is time well spent. It is more likely to produce increased results for the organization and for the manager's department and priorities.

It is ironic that many managers find that they spend the majority of their time with their troubled, or underperforming employees. This is despite the fact that the most significant value from their time and energy investment comes from the opposite priority.

Coaching is an effective tool for managers to deploy in their efforts to help employees succeed, and especially help employees increase their skills and their [potential opportunities for promotion](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/a-promotion-rewards-an-employee-for-work-contributions-1918231) or [lateral moves to more interesting positions](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/lateral-move-provides-a-career-path-for-an-employee-1918175).

6 Coaching Steps to Follow

Use these six steps to provide effective supportive coaching to your reporting employees.

* Show confidence in the employee's ability and willingness to solve the problem. Ask him or her for help in solving the problem or improving their performance. Ask the employee to join in with you with the goal of increasing the employees' effectiveness as a contributor to your organization.
* Describe the performance problem to the employee. Focus on the problem or behavior that needs improvement, not on the person. Use descriptions of the behavior with examples so that [you and the employee share meaning](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/communication-in-the-workplace-1918089).

Ask for the employee's view of the situation. Do they see the same problem or opportunity that you do?

* Determine whether issues exist that limit the employee's ability to perform the task or accomplish the objectives. Four common barriers are time, training, tools, and temperament. Determine how to remove these barriers. Determine whether the employee needs your help to remove the barriers—a key role of a manager—or if he is able to tackle them by himself.
* Discuss potential solutions to the problem or improvement actions to take. Ask the employee for ideas on how to correct the problem or prevent it from happening again. With a high performing employee, talk about continuous improvement.
* Agree on a written action plan that lists what the employee, the manager, and possibly, the HR professional, will do to correct the problem or improve the situation. Identify the core goals that the employee must meet to achieve the appropriate level of performance that the organization needs.
* Set a date and time for follow-up. Determine if a [critical feedback path is needed](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/delegation-as-a-leadership-style-1916731), so the manager knows how the employee is progressing. Offer positive encouragement. Express confidence in the employee's ability to improve. Recognize, however, that the only person [who is in charge of their performance improvement](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-take-responsibility-for-your-life-1919214) is the employee. As much as you try to help, he is the one in charge.

The Bottom Line

You can [help your reporting employees improve their current performance](https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-improve-your-performance-at-work-1918645), or in the case of an already effective employee, help them become more effective. Performance coaching is a powerful tool when managers take advantage of its usefulness.

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