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Tips from *LifeSolutions*

The Successful Supervisor

When managers and supervisors assume a coaching approach in their relationships with the people who report to them, their focus shifts in a very dramatic way. It goes from "what have you done for me lately" to "how can I help you succeed?" In some ways, this is a selfless position to take because it recognizes that encouraging an employee while still holding the person accountable is a more effective strategy than a strategy of monitoring and discipline. In this second of a two-part Successful Supervisor, we'll discuss motivation and creativity, two traits we all want to see more of in our organizations. Managers and supervisors can do a lot to help those traits rise to the surface. Email EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact your EAP account manager at 1-800-647-3327 with any questions or feedback.

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A coach/manager needs to know what helps an employee feel competent and challenged. Most of us would guess that money is a primary motivator for most employees. Studies on motivation reveal, however, that the three chief employee motivators are all internal. They are:

- Autonomy
- Mastery
- Purpose

If employees are paid enough to meet their basic needs and if they perceive their salary as fair and reasonable, money as a reward becomes a neutral motivator.

Autonomy occurs when employees, to the degree possible, are allowed to be self-directed. Individuals work better and are more engaged when they are able to determine what they want to work on and are encouraged to establish their own goals and milestones. Obviously, in some lines of work, protocol is largely determined outside of an individual's prerogatives. This is where clever and compassionate management finds a way to carve out areas of self-directed work as much as are possible.

The second motivator, every bit as important, is mastery. People want to get better at what they do — they want to achieve a level of excellence. Mastery is self-reinforcing. It tends to lead people to aspire to increased levels of **mastery**.

Purpose is when people are attached to a bigger picture than just the job they do. When employees believe that the work they are doing is integral to the overall goals of their organization . . . that what they do plays a critical role in the organization's success, they are more likely to feel engaged and take pride in what they do. Basically, it is important for employees to feel that their work has meaning and value.

Add to this picture of motivation Mihaley Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) concept of flow. Flow is defined as completely-focused motivation. Flow is "engagement with everyday life." When we are in a state of flow, time seems to disappear. We are totally immersed in what we are doing. Flow occurs when challenge and competence are balanced. Part of our responsibility as coaches is

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to help employees become skilled enough to feel competent and to give them the opportunity to do work that is sufficiently challenging. Flow is an optimal human state. Certainly we cannot hope to be in a state of flow or help our employees achieve flow all of the time. When flow occurs, we, as managers, simply need to get out of the way.

While all of the above information helps us to see that our ability to develop the talents of our employees is the manager's job, there are real life challenges. Typically they have to do with not having enough time, not having the skill, seeing this kind of coaching role as beyond our responsibility and comfort, or viewing this approach as counter to the company culture. These obstacles are real and important. There is compelling evidence, however, that the time and skills invested in approaching employees with a coaching style pays off for a business in terms of employee productivity, employee engagement, and even employee health. The Saratoga Institute conducted a coaching study in which they interviewed 19,700 exiting employees and their bosses. 85 percent of the bosses said that their employees left for more money and opportunity. 80% of the exiting employees said that they left because of poor relationships, poor opportunities for development, and poor coaching from the boss (Cashman, K. 2008).

A study by Manchester, Inc. examined the impact of coaching in 56 companies with 100 executives. Their findings suggest that 74 percent of the sponsors and 86 percent of the participants were very satisfied with the process. From the survey of respondents who received coaching, it was estimated that **coaching resulted in an average return of 5.7 times the initial investment**.

Furthermore, coaching contributed to a perception of increased productivity for 53 percent of respondents and improved quality of work for 48 percent of the respondents. When asked in the survey, which work group relationships improved as a result of coaching, the results indicated that 77 percent reported improvement with direct reports, 71 percent reported improvement with immediate supervisors and 63 percent reported improvement with peers. Of those receiving coaching, 61% reported a significant increase in their overall level of work and job satisfaction.[5] (Kenneth Novak, PhD, Envisia Learning, Executive Coaching: Fad or Future? California Psychiatrist, July/August 2003, Vol. XXXVI, pp. 16-17.)

In summary, while coaching requires a very real investment of time and effort on the part of leaders, in the long run it pays off. The high returns in terms of employee engagement, creativity, well-being, and productivity are well worth the investment.

Call *Life*Solutions at 1.800.647.3327 if you would like to learn more about coaching principles that you can apply to enhance employee engagement.

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