

# The Coaching Playbook

A Four-Part Summary on How to Maximize Employee Performance in the Public Sector



Government



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For your organization to fulfill your mission, you need your employees to be peak performers. But how can you ensure that everyone—from seasoned veterans to new hires—reach their full potential?

**By offering coaching.** Coaching's long-term benefits to an organization's success have long been proven. Over 70% of coaching recipients saw an increase in work performance, relationships, and communication skills, and 80% reported having more self-confidence. It's no wonder that over 51% of companies in the corporate sphere now consider coaching "crucial to their strategy," and that 86% felt they recouped their investment.<sup>2</sup>

**For public sector organizations, it's perhaps even more critical.** Public sector budgets continue to shrink, while turnover increases. Top talent is frequently poached by the private sector, corporations who can afford to offer larger salaries and more expansive training opportunities.



<sup>1</sup> No author. "The Benefits of Coaching." Outstand.org. Date published: March 28, 2013. Date accessed: March 30, 2015. <http://www.outstand.org/index.php/2013/03/the-benefits-of-coaching/>

<sup>2</sup> No author. "The Benefits of Coaching." Outstand.org. Date published: March 28, 2013. Date accessed: March 30, 2015. <http://www.outstand.org/index.php/2013/03/the-benefits-of-coaching/>

Coaching can be a crucial component in retaining, engaging, and improving great—and not-so-great—talent. In a survey by CPS HR Consulting of city, county, state, and federal agency employees, 87% of supervisors and 89% of employees coached were satisfied or very satisfied after coaching.<sup>3</sup> Even more importantly, supervisors saw tangible results in employees, including increased engagement and self-confidence, improved leadership skills, increased quality of work, and improved political acumen.<sup>4</sup>

**Read on to learn more about the world of coaching, how it can help public sector employees realize their potential, and the positive impact it can have on fulfilling your mission:**

- 1** **What is coaching?**
- 2** **Who can be a coach?**
- 3** **How do you coach?**
- 4** **What are the benefits of coaching?**

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<sup>3</sup> M Hertneck. "HR Survey Series: The Impact of Coaching on Public Sector Employees." CPS HR Consulting. Page 8. Accessed at [http://www.cpshr.us/documents/resources/SurveySeries\\_Coaching.pdf](http://www.cpshr.us/documents/resources/SurveySeries_Coaching.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> M Hertneck. "HR Survey Series: The Impact of Coaching on Public Sector Employees." CPS HR Consulting. Page 11. Accessed at [http://www.cpshr.us/documents/resources/SurveySeries\\_Coaching.pdf](http://www.cpshr.us/documents/resources/SurveySeries_Coaching.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> M Hertneck. "HR Survey Series: The Impact of Coaching on Public Sector Employees." CPS HR Consulting. Page 11. Accessed at [http://www.cpshr.us/documents/resources/SurveySeries\\_Coaching.pdf](http://www.cpshr.us/documents/resources/SurveySeries_Coaching.pdf).



# 1

## What is Coaching?



Coaching is an umbrella term for the process of developing people's skills and abilities, boosting their performance, and dealing with issues and challenges before they become major problems.<sup>6</sup> The meaning of coaching has evolved over the past few decades. Employees used to view coaching as punishment, but now many see it as an essential part of making a bigger impact at their organization.

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<sup>6</sup> No author. "What is Coaching?" MindTools. No date published. Date accessed: March 27, 2015. [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM\\_15.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_15.htm)

<sup>7</sup> Garr, Stacia. "High Impact Performance Management" Bersin & Assoc. Date published: Nov. 2011. Date accessed: March 22, 2015.



# Coaching Categories

Coaching can work for any employee of your organization, and a study by Bersin & Associates notes that coaching is typically broken down into three categories and goals:<sup>7</sup>

## Executive Coaching

Designed for top tier employees to improve their performance and leadership capabilities

## Leadership and capacity building coaching

Aimed at helping managers become better leaders to prepare them for more high-level responsibilities

## Performance Coaching

Implemented to help employees improve performance in their current roles, build strengths, or correct weaknesses.

The more senior the employee, the more likely they are to be coached by someone outside the organization. Lower-level colleagues will usually be coached by their direct superior. *With coaching, though, it's important to know that there are no steadfast rules.* Coaching should be thought of as flexible – the most important part is that the coach, the student, and the organization all agree on the goals and process before the endeavor begins.

<sup>7</sup> Garr, Stacia. "High Impact Performance Management." Bersin & Assoc. Date published: Nov. 2011. Date accessed: March 22, 2015.



# Coaching Relationships

Everyone – employees, coaches, and the agency – aims for success. Coaching can be the rising tide that lifts all boats, but at its core, it's about creating and fostering a bond built around professional development. Take a look at the different types of coaching/learner relationships and the pros and cons of each.

## Manager/employee relationships

At most public sector organizations, managers typically know their own employees' work history, aspirations, and values better than anyone. Thus, they can also have the biggest impact on their development and are often best suited to take on a coaching role. But because managers have such a big influence on an individual's professional growth, employees may feel they're risking their own career progress by sharing certain feelings, especially if they're critical of their manager or the organization.

## Third parties/employee relationships

The advantage of a third party is they're able to offer a fresh, unbiased perspective. The student may also feel less trepidation about being completely open since their coach isn't as involved in their advancement. However, as that coach may not know much about an employee's background, goals, or learning style, it could take a while to build a level of trust and rapport, which may slow down the process.

## Outside coaching

Coaching from outside the organization can present itself in two ways: 1) outside coaches can be brought in to train managers on how to coach other employees, or 2) they can be brought in to do the actual coaching. In the first scenario, the coach must be sure that the techniques they're teaching can be adapted to who is going to be coached. In the latter situation, an outside coach can be hired to work directly with learners.

Coaching is all about developing the skills and performance of the recipient, but with so many considerations of how to get there, the process cannot be taken lightly. After deciding which style of coaching makes sense for both the organization and employees, leaders must then decide where the coaching should come from. In the next section, we'll discuss who can be a coach and how to evaluate one, as well as how different coaching styles benefit your employees in different ways.



# 2

## Who Can Be a Coach?



Anyone can be a coach, but it's critical to ensure they have the necessary skills to ensure a successful experience for both parties. A coach may be asked to put on different hats to help maximize employees' talents. Coaches will also need to have a strategy in place. Their leadership can come in a wide variety of styles, and each one should be implemented strategically to foster your team's growth.

There are six coaching personas<sup>8</sup> – each benefit your employees differently.



# Coaching Personas

The Harvard Business Review found there are six types of coaching personas.<sup>8</sup> Determine which type is most appropriate for your employees to gain the desired outcome:



## Expert

Their value comes from advanced knowledge in a specific area. Experts' authority comes from being the smartest person in the room, but they can be devalued if they no longer carry that title.



## Trainer

They can look at an employee's job performance and show them how to do it better. Trainers may not be the best coaches if what needs improvement isn't job-related. For example, a trainer can provide a project manager or assistant with tricks to improve productivity and time management, but they may not be the best coach if the issue is that they don't get along with colleagues.



## Evangelist

These leaders spread a message and can rally people to a cause. People are motivated differently, so trying to inspire a team with one message may work on some employees but not others.



## Coach

In this role, a coach will ask questions that guide employees down a path of discovering answers for themselves. Note that the coach persona is not an expert in a particular skill set, so they won't teach your call center rep how to handle angry taxpayers, but they can ask questions that will help the rep discover their own roadblocks in their career overall.



## Mentor

They value long-term growth over immediate performance. Coaching is extended over a longer period of time, with the student meeting with the mentor for new insights and reflections on growth and goals.



## Motivator

This persona helps others identify their goals and what they want to achieve. Keep in mind, though, that they may not be an expert in any particular field, so they likely can't help an employee in performing specific, public agency-related tasks.



# Does Your Coach Have a Playbook?

Before allowing a coach to engage with your team, make sure they have a plan in place to help you get the strongest return on your investment. There are no universal standards for what makes a great coach, but Forbes notes coaches should have a five-part strategy: <sup>9</sup>

## Clarity about the process

A true coach will walk you through how they work, help your employees' define their biggest challenges, and assist them to visualize their future. They'll also offer to teach new skills and/or behaviors, and show how what students learn will help in their job. Be wary, though, of coaches who don't offer much substance and appear to value enthusiasm for the teaching experience over offering any specifics.

## Seeks different viewpoints

Coaches will ask their student about their goals, challenges, and perspectives. But there are two sides to every story. A coach should ask those same questions to a student's colleagues to create a more detailed picture of the situation. This enables coaches to provide insights and training that align with both the employee and the organization's goals.

## Emphasizes real change

Great coaches should be more than a sounding board or someone employees can vent to. They need to teach additional skills, show how to change someone's behavior, or develop an employee's situational awareness or knowledge base, and also demonstrate how these can be integrated into an employee's job role. Occasionally being a therapist is fine, and even has some merit, but that shouldn't be the foundation of coaching.

## Has proven successes

True coaching enables employees to become stronger contributors to their organizations and coaches should be able to point to past successes as proof of their own abilities. First-time coaches should be able to lay out a comprehensive strategy that demonstrates their knowledge, past successes, and how their coaching will show a return on investment—especially in a public sector context.

## Defines confidentiality

Coaches need to establish what is and what isn't confidential. All parties should agree on what is allowed to be shared. Trust is the foundation of an honest, open coaching relationship, and employees need to feel safe when expressing their thoughts. If a coach is vague in defining what is confidential, or shares information that was agreed would be confidential, the relationship should be ended immediately.

<sup>9</sup> No author. "Business Results Through Coaching." Bersin by Deloitte. No date published. Date accessed: March 26, 2015. <http://www.bersin.com/News/Details.aspx?id=15040>.



# Must-Have Coaching Skill Sets

In addition to the above, coaches should be able to offer intangible skills that enable employees to achieve a higher level of success. Whether a coach is “coaching your coaches,” or if a manager is coaching a more junior colleague, they should be able to:<sup>10</sup>

## Listen actively

Employees need to know that when discussing career aspirations and challenges, their coach is as invested in their success as they are. By being an active listener, the coach will be able to fully internalize and understand employees’ goals and offer meaningful solutions for impactful growth. Part of listening actively is not checking e-mails, not looking at a cell phone, or doing anything else that distracts from the one-on-one element.

## Reinforce positive behaviors

A quality coach should reward employees when they’ve made the right move or decision, rather than punish them for the wrong one. By rewarding correct choices, the employee will display better performance-related behaviors as an instinct, rather than as something they have to think about doing before acting.

## Ask open-ended questions

Asking “yes/no” questions, or ones that similarly offer a limited number of responses, are risky because employees have to choose best-fit answers that may not paint the whole picture. Instead, a good coach will use open-ended question, such as “How do you feel when...” or “What do you think is...” This enables the employee to provide detailed, candid answers, rather than be pigeon-holed into responses that may not present the most accurate information.

Coaches  
should listen actively, reinforce  
positive behaviors, and ask open-ended questions.<sup>7</sup>



# 3

## How Do You Coach?



There are many ways to coach employees, but to get the most effective results, employees should be paired with mentors whose style is the best possible fit for their personality, goals, and challenges.

Best practice –  
coaching is fluid and differs based  
on desired goals.



# How to Coach

## How do coaches communicate?

Before beginning any type of coaching, all parties should agree on when and how the coach and employee will communicate. Will it happen in-person? Via phone? E-mail? Video chat? A mix of those? Coaching is fluid, and it differs from one case to another, so the right answer is the one that everyone is comfortable with.

## When do you coach?

Real coaching occurs over a long period of time, not in one meeting or a quick e-mail. The process can be set up at scheduled intervals, on an as-needed basis, or even a combination of both. Similar to other aspects of coaching, the right answer is what the coach and employee agree on, and how the desired results will drive the student's and agency's goals. What's important to know is that coaching can, and should, continue after the formal development period ends to reinforce the lessons learned.

## Coach with goals in mind

Before starting a coaching relationship, the coach and student should agree on the purpose of their interactions. This not only helps determine what kind of coach persona is the best fit but also how coaching will be implemented. Is the purpose to improve effectiveness in the department? Communication skills? Leadership abilities? Confidence? All parties need to agree on goals, expectations, timelines, key performance indicators, and more. Employees need to know what the end looks like before they start the journey.

Coaching can manifest itself in a variety of styles, and the right style is one where the coach, employee, and organization all agree on what the outcome should be. From when and how coaching should occur, to whether it should be done in-person, electronically, or both, as long as employee reach their desired goals, then the coaching strategy was effective. Coaching has clear benefits to those who receive it, but it can also have a tremendous impact on a public sector organization's ability to achieve their mission, support their community, and function as responsible stewards of taxpayer funds.



# 4

## What are the Bottom Line Benefits of Coaching?



For all the talk about how coaching works and what it means to employees, what ultimately matters is whether your agency stands to benefit from it. A well-coached employee may feel more positive than ever about their career future, but there's only a return on investment if coaching translates into stronger performance, retention, and goal achievement. The good news is that coaching has tangible benefits to both public sector organizations and all levels of employees.

The United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) advocates coaching for employees to maximize employee potential and notes that “the development of coaching skills are increasingly seen as an essential part of effective management and leadership.”<sup>12</sup>



# Coaching Benefits

## How coaching benefits organizations

The United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) advocates coaching for employees to maximize employee potential and notes that “the development of coaching skills are increasingly seen as an essential part of effective management and leadership.”<sup>11</sup> The OPM finds it so valuable that it offers coaching training through the Federal Executive Institute.

## How coaching benefits public sector leaders

Coaching is crucial for organizations facing the exodus of Baby Boomer leadership, especially as succession planning in the public sector is still an emerging practice. Coaching can help potential leaders gain the focus and support they need to apply for and succeed in new positions. When used in combination with succession planning and training, coaching creates strong leaders who are more confident and less likely to be “surprised” by management challenges in the public sector.

## How coaching benefits employees as a whole

While studies are limited regarding the measured benefit of coaching to public sector employees, there is tremendous research regarding the benefit to employees in general. With this in mind—employees share goals and aspirations in common, regardless of industry or organization—coaching can and should be offered to anyone who feels they can benefit. In one study, 43% of employees experienced an increase in motivation, 50% enjoyed a stronger working relationship with their team, 47% found a greater ability to see other perspectives, 50% acquired a new skill or improved an existing one, 43% reported an increase in work life clarity, and 43% improved their performance.<sup>15</sup>

50% of employees who receive coaching acquired a new skill or improved an existing one; 43% improved their performance

<sup>11</sup> “Coaching in Government.” United States Office of Personnel Management. Accessed at <https://www.opm.gov/wiki/training/Coaching-in-Government/Print.aspx>.

<sup>15</sup> Marber, Julie. “Are There Any Tangible Benefits to Coaching?” Coach Federation. Date published: Feb. 2007. Date accessed: March 30, 2015. <http://www.coachfederation.org/files/includes/docs/037WhatAreTheBenefitsOfCoachingSummaryFeb07.pdf>



## The Writing is on the Wall

Coaching has definitive, measurable benefits to a public sector organization and its employees, from the ability to provide better services to improving job performance, reducing turnover, and ensuring organizational longevity.



For public sector organizations, coaching is all about fulfilling the organization's mission by maximizing the performance and passion of leaders and employees, regardless of whether it's a superstar looking to reach greater heights, a new hire wanting to start off on the right foot, or even a struggling employee who needs to improve. Anyone can be a coach, as long as they have certain intangible skills and receive the proper training. The organization, coach, and employee need to agree on what to improve, how to do it, and how to define success. As long as everyone is on the same page and dedicated to professional development, the end result will always be employees, and an organization, that reach—or exceed—potential.