



Webinar D7 – Invest in People: The Use of Coaching in Professional Development and Continuous Learning

Question and Answer

Question 1 - How do you handle a situation where an employee absolutely shuts out coaching/accepting new ideas that are different than their own?

Answer from Dathan Rush: Start where the employee is. Find out what the employee currently knows, understands, and is doing in order to find common ground that matches the new knowledge or intended outcome. Seek to understand the employee's ideas about how to learn and apply the new knowledge and how it relates to the employee's goals and priorities. Develop a joint plan of first steps and celebrate the accomplishments.

Answer from Nancy Siebel: This can be a difficult and frustrating situation, especially if you are working under time pressure. It might be necessary to spend a number of sessions on relationship-building before being able to directly address the coaching agenda. For someone to learn something from you, you first have to learn something about him/her. Getting to know that person by finding out how they got involved in their current work, what they find rewarding and challenging about it and perhaps what it means to them to be working with a coach are some of the things you might learn from them. They may need time to learn that you can be trusted. You can demonstrate that by being consistent, by pitching in and helping if you arrive and things are really busy in the classroom, by following through on what you say you will do and accepting that they may not be excited at the idea of working with you. Resistance to new ideas can happen for a number of reasons. One way to think about this is to mentally role play the situation. Think of what it would be like for you to be told you had to be coached by someone you don't know and are not sure you can trust. How would you feel? How could that person establish a connection with you? It may be helpful to reflect on some of these ideas in order to understand the staff perspective.

Question 2 – What's the difference between reflective supervision and coaching?

Answer from Nancy Siebel: I think one of the major differences is the role of the supervisor as compared to the role of the coach. A supervisor's job has to do with assuring quality of services and the carrying out of the program's policies, practices and mission. Supervisors have responsibilities for administrative, clinical/practice and reflective aspects of the work. Supervisors may indeed at times use a coaching approach to strengthening staff members' competencies. The separate role of coach typically is focused on improving practice often through integrating knowledge gained through training or other learning experiences. The coach is not involved in the administrative aspects of supervision and typically has more focus on clinical/practice and reflective aspects of the work. A

coach is likely to focus on identifying strengths, goals and plans with action steps to reach that goal. A supervisor can do those things and may use other strategies as well. Within their roles both a supervisor and a coach can promote reflective thinking and practice. In fact I think for coaching to be effective, there must be a reflective supervisor to support the staff members' work in an ongoing way. A coach's engagement is likely to be short term while a supervisors' will likely be more ongoing.

Question 3 - What effect do cultural differences have on coaching?

Answer from Dathan Rush: Coaching is a relationship-based practice. In any relationship, it is important to understand the other person's beliefs, values, and culture as well as the impact they may have on the present situation and the style of interaction we may choose to use. The coach should be open to learning from the person receiving coaching. The characteristics of coaching (i.e., observation, action/practice, reflection, feedback, joint planning) can be implemented based on the coach's knowledge and understanding of the unique qualities of the person he/she may be coaching.

Answer from Nancy Siebel: It is possible that cultural differences may complicate communication. It can be worthwhile to discuss differences in culturally based values, beliefs and assumptions in order to improve communication and mutual understanding. If the cultural differences reinforce perceived power differences, perhaps these should be addressed and directly discussed. It might be useful also, to identify what each person can learn from the other based on his/her different cultural perspectives. Establish some agreements, such as, "Ask me what I mean if I say something that is hard to understand," or "See if we can identify the assumptions that underlie our ideas on how to _____."

Question 4 - What happens if the coach has concerns about the staff person's performance? How do they navigate the relationship with the supervisor?

Answer from Dathan Rush: Prior to initiating the coaching process, the coach, supervisor, and staff person should meet to agree upon the parameters of the coaching relationship in terms of content as well as when/how the supervisor will be involved. If the coach has concerns about the staff person's performance, this may be content for the coaching interactions during which the coach can support the staff person in reflecting upon his/her current knowledge and understanding of the performance standard and how his/her current behavior matches the standard, and then develop a joint plan for improvement. If the performance issue is not directly related to the content of focus for the coach and staff person, then following reflection with the staff member, the joint plan may be for how to bring the supervisor into the conversation to provide needed support.

Answer from Nancy Siebel: One more thing to clarify early is the boundary of the coaching discussions and any limits to those boundaries. The conversations are private and confidential unless the coach learns something that puts him in a position of a legally mandated reporter. This varies state by state and coaches should make sure they understand legal obligations relevant to their work related to licensure, safety of individuals and child maltreatment.

Question 5 – With limited amount of funding, in general, is it more effective to offer a smaller number of coaching hours to many training participants or greater number of hours to a small number of participants?

Answer from Dathan Rush: The answer generally tends to be related to the content and intended outcomes of the coaching. In most instances, the focus of coaching for professional development is mastery of new skills within the actual work environment. The rate at which individuals reach mastery varies based on many things including their prior knowledge and experience, motivation, and time to use the new skills. It is recommended to work with a smaller group of individuals to build both their mastery of the new skills and their capacity to provide peer-to-peer coaching. This helps to create an ongoing organizational culture of learning and support for one another.