



Critical Coaching Skills

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Develop the coaching and mentoring skills that help improve individual performance.

Critical Coaching Skills

Earlier, we mentioned that there are five critical skills for any coach.

- Interpersonal communication skills
- Helping skills
- Mentoring skills
- Teaching skills
- Challenging skills

Those interpersonal skills are critical. If your employees feel like you aren't approachable, and they can't talk to you, none of the other skills are going to matter very much.

Helping Skills

Use questions to obtain information, establish rapport, clarify, or stimulate thought. How they are asked can either facilitate or hinder the process of communicating.

Mentoring Skills

Overcome resistance and distrust by concentrating on what you have in common.

Be open about your own thoughts and feelings, demonstrate competencies in the individual's area, and always have the person's best interests in mind.

Teaching Skills

Encourage individuals and support them in thinking through their commitments to action.

Make your actions match your words (for example, if a person needs a coach's support, it is important that the coach not give the impression of being too busy).

Challenging Skills

Speak frankly from your more objective position as a coach. Draw attention to certain issues for the benefit of the other person.

Phrase your questions so the other person is challenged. (How do you know that? What evidence do you have for that?)

Setting Goals with SPIRIT

Setting Achievable Goals

Helping people set goals is a great way for them to see their own action plans come to life, and to realize that they can get what they are after. When you work with your protégé, ask them about their personal goals and dreams. If they have not given a lot of thought to this, it's worth recommending that they do some learning about goal setting and achievement to help them stay focused and realize the value from having things written down.

Identifying Your Dreams

There are many areas that we can set goals in. Some ideas:

- Career (responsibilities or a specific position... or maybe even your own business)
- Income
- Relationships (marriage, children, family, friends)
- Things to learn
- Hobbies to take up
- Volunteer activities or charities to support
- Recreational activities
- Home, vehicles, or other possessions to purchase
- Places to travel to
- Spiritual
- Health (examples: lose 20 pounds, exercise more frequently)
- Educational
- Behaviors and habits to develop or change

Some specific dreams might include:

- Set up a well-organized and efficient workspace.
- Get promoted at work.
- Learn how to do yoga and practice it daily.
- Climb Mount Everest.

Now, clearly some of these are achievable in the short term while others will take longer. Some will obviously take more work than others. A coach is in an ideal position to help employees write their goals down in a meaningful way.

SPIRIT Goals

Each dream can be broken down into several small, achievable goals that will help people get where they want to go. Good goals should have SPIRIT!

Specific

Be specific about what you want or don't want to achieve. The result should be tangible and measurable. "Look gorgeous" is pretty ambiguous; "Lose 20 pounds" is specific.

Prizes

Reward yourself at different points in the goal, particularly if it's long-term. If your goal is to organize your work space, for example, you might purge old files and documents and then reward yourself with a new item for your space, like an interesting clock, a picture, or some other prize.

Individual

The goal must be something that the employee wants to do. If you want your protégé to organize their workspace but they think it looks fine, they are not going to want to work towards the goal unless they link their own motivation to it in a meaningful way.

Review

Review your progress periodically. Does the goal still make sense? Are you stuck? Do you need to adjust certain parts of it?

Inspiring

Frame the goal positively. Make it fun to accomplish. You could make a poster of the end result, frame it, and post it on the wall. "My workspace looks just the way I want it!" is far more inspiring than, "I hate this crummy workspace."

Time-Bound

Give yourself a deadline for achieving the goal. Even better, split the goal into small parts and give yourself a deadline for each item.

Test Your Knowledge

Getting on Track

As a coach, you can help your protégé review their goals and stay on track. This means that each week, they need to schedule time to work toward those goals. For some goals, time may have to be scheduled daily. Your role is to help them get where they want to go. If things are going wrong, have a coaching conversation with them to identify barriers, problem solve, and keep moving forward.

Use the space below to create a goal with SPIRIT.

Learning Styles and Principles

Learning Styles

Despite having made it through the school system, there are people who struggle with learning. There are also teachers who work outside the school system (including coaches) who have not really learned much about how people learn. Essentially, we learn by seeing, by hearing, and by doing. We all have preferences for how we learn, and depending on what we are learning, we may need things shared with us in different ways. When we are working with employees, we must assume we need to use all three of these learning styles in order to make the principles of our coaching and teaching stick.

How many of you know you must see someone’s name written down before you can remember it? That is an indication (not a guarantee) that you learn best by seeing your new skill being done by someone else, or you need to see directions on a map before you understand where you are going. On the other hand, if you need to actually say somebody’s name before you remember it, or if you only understand a problem by talking it through, or reading it out loud, you may be an aural learner, meaning you need to hear what you are trying to understand.

Still others aren’t really going to get the gist of any skill until they actually do it themselves, or incorporate some kind of physical activity. Kinesthetic learners have to be doing something, like completing the spreadsheet, or talking with the customer. During meetings they may be doodling or appear distracted, but they need the physical activity in order to register what’s being said.

Think of the types of skills you have to teach. What can you do to make sure you have covered all the learning styles?

Test Your Knowledge

Consider a skill that you might teach. Then, identify activities for each learning style.

Skill	Visual Activities	Auditory Activities	Kinesthetic Activities
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Adult Learning Principles

As adults, we learn to do by doing. Give trainees something practical to do with the information they have just heard. For example, have them fill in their planner for the next month or clean out their briefcase.

We get our impressions through our senses, so combine verbal explanations with written instructions, illustrations, or an object they can taste touch or smell. For example, in addition to verbal suggestions on time management, provide written materials, or perhaps demonstrate the proper technique for filing.

We learn when we are ready to learn. If possible, coach when there is a need for a particular skill. Help the employee understand how this learning can help them in their job, their career, or their interpersonal life. For example, learning to use time to our advantage is an essential skill if we juggle a job and a home, or if our job is particularly demanding. Most of us have things we would like to do if we could find the time.

We link new learning to what we already know. Try to make connections between what they are presently doing or saying and how they should behave differently after the training. For example, you could ask them to identify how they handle calls or e-mail now and help them work through a different way of handling these to save time. Ask them where they feel they start to lose control over their time and work from that starting point.

We learn one thing at a time, so teachers/coaches must watch that they don't rush through things too quickly, or give them too much to absorb at one time. After each learning point, it is a good idea to give people a chance to ask questions, to do an exercise to cement their understanding, or to let them practice what they have just learned. For example, you would want to make sure that trainees completely understand how to de-clutter their office before you move on to talk about using a planner.

We learn more rapidly when results are satisfying to us. Praise your trainees when they do well at even a small thing. Never ridicule them. Don't put people in positions where they might feel humiliated or threatened. For example, often just filling in a planner or setting up a telephone list of frequently called numbers can be a satisfying thing.

We need to understand what we learn. It may not be enough to just ask, "Is this clear?" or, "Do you understand?" However, if we break learning into small chunks and give them opportunities to practice, we can check back with them to see if we have been clear. Then, they have a better chance of understanding. For example, a case study or a skill-building exercise based on learning how to say "no" may be appropriate.

The Benefits/Consequences Matrix

One technique that can be used when you want to challenge your employee to do the best they can do, or want them to change their behavior, is to draw out a four quadrant matrix like this:

Consequences of Not Changing	Benefits of Not Changing
Benefits of Changing	Consequences of Changing

This matrix should be filled in by the person who is being asked to make the changes (such as your employee). This is a way to give them control over the decisions they make, yet at the same time see the situation from a different perspective.

Whether you do one of these or any other type of exercise, remember to include documentation in your file. Coaching, like any of your leadership activities, requires a paper trail.

Skills Involved in Coaching

Write the correct term next to each meaning.

Term	Meaning
	Probing until you are sure you understand a problem or issue.
	Giving someone your complete attention.
	Showing the other person by both verbal and non-verbal messages that you are engaged in the conversation.
	Asking open questions, reflecting, paraphrasing, summarizing, and clarifying to gain more information.

Term	Meaning
	Similar to paraphrasing, in that you echo the other person's words, or rephrase them in your own words, to check understanding and to elicit more information.
	Not ridiculing, humiliating, or rejecting the other person's thoughts and feelings.
	Sharing similar experiences of your own as a way to find common ground.
	Staying in the present and drawing attention to what is happening in the conversation.
	Pausing to gather up the key points of the conversation thus far.
	Being specific and concrete in terms of what you mean and what you expect. Concreteness can be enhanced by examples and illustrations.
	Passing along references or other resources; a willingness to help an employee find those products or services needed to do his/her job better.
	Agreeing and clarifying strategies and next steps.
	Taking time to go over what has already been said, agreed upon, or decided.
	Putting strategies or specific steps in place to ensure forward movement toward a goal.
	Validating an employee's worth and skills.
	Choosing words that are clear and unambiguous so the other person is certain of what aspects of performance are a problem.
	Determining boundaries and setting limits on what elements of a problem are being addressed.

Term	Meaning
	Spending more time discussing what will happen in the future rather than going back to rehash what has already happened.
	Allowing an employee's concerns to be the topic of discussion, when warranted, rather than pressing forward with your own concerns.
	Listening, asking questions, probing, and reflecting until you have a clear picture of background information.
	Reaching mutual agreement on what has been agreed to.