



# **The Everyday Leader**

*Masterfully Lead the People Who MUST Report to You*

*Real stories and actionable strategies to reduce missteps and  
grow in people leadership*

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*To be an effective coach, most managers need to adjust the content of their conversations, as well as their approach to employee communication.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Chapter 12

### The COACH Key

Employees today come to work with skills acquired through many channels thanks to advances in technology. They are informed and yearn greater self-direction. Leaders committed to developing the highest performing, innovative and change-adaptable staff teams become proficient *leader-coaches*. The command-and-control bosses cannot create the conditions for their teams to meet the challenges of the modern workplace.

Taking on a *leader-coach* approach means growing new skills. Various studies, and my own observations, reveal that many who say they're coaching, aren't. They are directing, advising, trying therapy, or acting as motivational speakers. There's a place for these, but when it comes to coaching direct reports, know when you're coaching rather than doing the others.

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<sup>1</sup> Gallup.com. State of American Workplace, 2017.

**Your aim as the coaching-leader is to convert talent into performance.**

Before delving into sharpening your coaching skills and applying that approach, be reminded that the relationship (connection) forms the foundation for effectively coaching your people to deliver their best work. Even if leaders perform the right coaching activities with their staff, *“all of these will fail to yield any benefits if the foundation of a solid relationship does not exist.”*<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 12 addresses the COACH key using these topics: 1) What coaching can do for you, 2) your readiness for coaching, 3) a coaching framework, 4) from telling and advising to listening and inquiring, and 5) mastering the art of feedback.

**1. What coaching can do for you**

Let’s first take a look at what it means to coach at work. I’ve developed the view that: *Coaching at work is a series of conversations that enable direct reports to unlock their inner-resources to achieve in their work and personal lives with increasing effectiveness and fulfillment. It is about a leader embracing a style of leading and developing their people that produces new insight, facilitates growth and unleashes the strengths of their reports (which also grows the leader).*

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<sup>2</sup> Zenger and Stinnett, *The Extraordinary Coach*, , p. 62.

**Note:** Workplace coaching differs from coaching with an external coach, especially as it relates to the client’s level of vulnerability and exposure.

**Remember:** Being coached by one’s supervisor is great, but they are still the supervisor who evaluates performance, whereas an external coach is not.

Here are a few more definitions of coaching to ensure a common understanding as you go through this chapter.

“interactions that help the individual being coached to expand awareness, discover better solutions, and make and implement better decisions.” (Zenger, p. 44)
“an efficient, high-impact process of dialogue that helps performers improve results in ways that are sustained over time.” <sup>3</sup>
partnered, thought-provoking process that inspires people to maximize their personal and professional potential. (International Coaching Federation)

Workplace coaching begins by recognizing you are *applying coaching as an approach* to heightening performance. Supervisors ought to remain cognizant that they have two roles (coach and supervisor) and not conflate the two. Managers “*hold employees accountable for results, while a coach helps people improve the skills needed to achieve those results. [Those managers] who coach both mandate the goals and help people develop the ability to accomplish them.*”<sup>4</sup>

I agree with the personal agency-building that James Flaherty<sup>5</sup> describes as the products of coaching: *long-term excellent performance, self-correction and self-generation*. In essence,

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<sup>3</sup> Neitlich, A. *Coach!*, 2016, p. 13

<sup>4</sup> O’Neill, M., *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*, 2007, p. 262

<sup>5</sup> Flaherty, J. *Coaching, Evoking Excellence in Others*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, 2010.

coaching builds people's own resources to achieve at high levels without endless external input (i.e., supervision).

**Benefits for the leader:** Building coaching skills will have advantages for you, your direct reports and colleagues (who might model your successful coaching). Coaching skills:

1. create a culture of co-accountability *with* direct reports.
2. lead to lasting transformation with its future focus on achieving better actions, thinking and results.
3. develop your leadership since coaching is two-way, i.e., you provide and seek it through feedback from your direct reports.
4. uncover more possibilities and potential within direct reports (who are rarely asked their thoughts or reasoning).
5. build bonds and loyalty to the organization and the team.
6. express your belief in each person's capacity to think, act, and grow better, differently, and creatively.
7. free your time for higher level work as increasingly capable direct reports apply their talents to more complex tasks.
8. help create a culture of learning and continuous growth.
9. support developing new leaders for organizational succession.
10. make you more flexible in your approach to solving problems.
11. provide a *framework* to help your direct reports grow.
12. bring more interest, quality and inspiration to the meeting time you spend with your direct reports.
13. distribute solution-finding and decision-making, easing pressure on you to have all the answers.



**Reflection:** Which of the above 13 benefits excite you the most as you make the shift to a coaching leader?

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## 2. Your readiness and conditions for coaching

**Check your beliefs:** Coaching is built on the premise that people are resilient and capable of *self-correction* (*recognizing whether they are doing well or not and adjusting their actions to improve*) and *self-generation* (they can independently discover ways to improve). As such, rather than the leader being bossy and directive when something doesn't go well, it's likely the employee already has a good idea about their errors. So, feedback coaching might begin with: *What's your view of the project's outcome? What worked well that you'd do again? What would you have liked to work better? What ideas do you have to approach the issue differently the next time?*

**The coaching-leader holds a positive belief about the potential of their direct reports to problem-solve.**

**Not a quick, simple shift:** Later, this chapter will present what appears as a simple framework to move you from always directing, telling and advising to listening and asking; applying the model will require you pay attention to making some shifts. You will probably be surprised when you become aware of how much you give orders (even if nicely) rather than inquiring

(often a better tactic). Telling is quick; it comes naturally for many of us, but, in the long run, it restricts growth. So, practice, even if you need sticky note reminders that say “*Listen, don’t tell. Wait. Let them think before you jump in.*”

**The limits of telling and directing:** Staff members do not always need the leader’s solutions to *their* situations. They need the leader’s skills in helping them discover their own solutions and the leader’s belief in their ability to do so. Solutions for one person are rarely the same for the next.

**Be prepared:** Your scheduled one-on-one meetings can be part check-in and part coaching. There is no need for you to label it a coaching meeting; the main thing is to apply a *coaching approach* to address challenges and opportunities. If the meeting is 60 minutes, maybe 10-15 minutes can be spent on updates and the rest on work-related coaching. The direct report should play a key part in choosing the meeting *topics*, while you mostly focus on the meeting *process*. Be flexible.

*Prepare your mind and the coaching space.* Coaching requires your full attention. That means arranging for a private space and being fully present (without distraction). This allows you to listen intently and ask questions that enable rather than block thinking. A sample set of questions (later in this chapter) might be useful as you transition to a coaching leader style.

*Prepare your direct reports:* If your style is not already a growth-promoting coaching one, when you make the change,

your staff may initially be thrown off. Though you don't need to announce, "I'm coaching you," you might let them know that you are changing to what you believe is a better approach to the one-on-one meetings. Let them know the meetings will be more valuable by 1) focusing more on their growth and development not just updates, 2) spending time hearing what's on their mind and topics of interest to them, 3) helping you learn more about the work from them since they are closer to the work and likely have solutions and insights, and 4) checking in on the usefulness and quality of your one-on-one meetings. (See *Appendix* for a sample coaching format.)

**Be mindful of your reason for coaching:** You aim to encourage your direct reports to make better choices, increase problem-solving confidence, expand thinking and beliefs to, ultimately, perform at a higher level. You do this through applying coaching principles.

**Be flexible and consistent:** Being flexible means releasing preconceived solutions to problems to open the way to your staffers exploring their issues. During their exploration, you might discover there are better ways of addressing the situation than the one you had in mind.

Stay the course, knowing that change requires more than one conversation. Coaching continuity reinforces and sustains growth. Whether it's a five-minute coaching conversation or your regular meeting, continue the process to see results.



Aim for a coaching culture through your consistency. Though every conversation doesn't require coaching, in as much as possible apply the style regularly, through both quick problem-solving interactions and structured, scheduled one-on-ones.

Not every conversation benefits from coaching. There are times when being directive is best, such as when time constraints dictate faster decision-making.

**Prepare to be more silent:** Using a *coaching leader* method means learning to be silent more often. Listening is a powerful coaching skill, much more useful than non-stop talking. Your input should be intentional, limited, and meaningful, mostly interjecting good questions to help move the conversation along a path that enables direct reports to identify their next actions. Resist the urge to jump in early to provide answers.

**Let go of fixing people.** Remember, coaching assumes people have the most knowledge and resources to solve their problems. Help them do that. Paraphrasing something I came across: *“Coaching isn't about stepping in and doing your team member's work. It is about helping them be more effective so they can do the work without you standing over them.”*

**Think about the micro-managing to under-managing spectrum:** Coaching enables a balance between hands-on and hands-off leadership. Micromanaging as a style is constraining for you and your team. **Leaders' styles tend to waver**

**between over and under-management. Neither is ideal; coaching allows you to achieve a better balance.**

Micro- or over-management is the tendency of fearful, commanding leaders to be controlling about their direct reports' work and processes. Some of the signs: *requiring every task be approved by you, being copied on every email, having to know your staff whereabouts at all times, re-doing their work, and hardly ever delegating tasks.*

This kind of management creates a debilitating environment that smothers creativity, fosters dependency, immobilizes action, and instills anxiety. During the few occasions when I worked under a micro-managing leader, my thought was, "If you're doing my job, who's doing yours? In fact, what is yours?"

Micro-managers justify themselves with statements like<sup>6</sup>:

- ✓ It saves time for me to just do it myself.
- ✓ Too much is at stake to allow this to go wrong.
- ✓ My credibility is on the line if it's not done right.
- ✓ When I'm not involved, they are sure to mess things up.

*At the other end of the spectrum is the hands-off manager, and that's not ideal either.* Some people love the idea of a hands-off manager, at least initially. They experience freedom and autonomy, but eventually realize they are lacking challenge, support or growth. Further, your direct reports suffer from

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkins, M. Signs that you're a micromanager, *HBR*, Nov. 2014

inattention and little strategic focus to their work. When the hands-off manager is complacent and lacks vision, there is little advocacy and mentoring for their employees. Being led by this type leads to disengagement, boredom, and career stagnation.

**A story of extremes.** *“Following a horrid experience with a micro-manager who made my life stressful, I was ecstatic to work with my new manager who basically said, ‘You know your work. Do it the way that works best and I’ll check in when we have our bi-weekly meeting.’ Yippee! I loved this until about six months in. I was bored, directionless and felt stuck because I had no mentor, no learning, no champion... just a complacent supervisor who was content to just do her job the same way over and over. I began to dread going to work because I felt rudderless. In the end, I don’t know which type was worst- micro or no management.”* Millennial HR advisor

The coach-leader is a third and better path. It’s not over or under-management; it’s providing what each direct report needs using a coaching framework.

### **3. Apply a coaching framework**

During coaching conversations, the direct reports provide most of the session goals, and you provide a process that helps them grow. You might help your team members define some of the goals (especially related to their performance metrics).

Generally, though, the session goals belong to them along with how they think they can best achieve them.

**A basic framework for supervisory coaching.** It's a *framework—not a strict, scripted process*. The model below offers you a mental model that can lead to greater awareness, discovery and transformation for your staff. It draws from the GROW<sup>7</sup> model and the FUEL<sup>8</sup> framework.



<sup>7</sup> Created by Sir John Whitmore in 1980

<sup>8</sup> From Zenger and Stinnett, *The Extraordinary Coach*.

Here are examples of the types of questions for each step.

Description	Simple Guiding Questions (or use similar ones in your words)
<p>➊ After building <b>rapport</b>, here you set the <b>goal</b>, or learn what your staffer is trying to achieve and why it's important (short- or longer-term)</p>	<p><i>What's the goal you'd like to achieve? What topic do you want to talk about? What's the most important thing we should spend our time on? What makes this important for you?</i></p>
<p>➋ Now together, <b>explore</b> to get a better picture of what's happening right now and what's been tried</p>	<p><i>Briefly, what's been happening? Can you help me better understand what you are facing? What have you tried so far? Which of your current strengths have you used for this? What are the obstacles? Is it a realistic goal?</i></p>
<p>➌ Brainstorm a range of <b>options</b> (supervisor may add to these), choose the best options, set <b>time-bound actions</b> and what success would look like when the goal is achieved</p>	<p><i>What can you do to accomplish this? What else? Which option makes the most sense for you? If you do these things, what do you think will be different? What are you committed to doing next to achieve the goal? What's your timeline? What support can I give to help you be effective?</i></p>
<p>➍ <b>Ongoing</b> coaching, check <b>accountability</b> for action steps, <b>reflect</b> on progress, <b>adjust</b> actions as needed.</p>	<p>Check in on action steps and progress; repeat steps 2-4 as needed. <i>Can we check in on progress? Can we walk through your actions steps and how things went? What worked? What didn't? How do you feel about the progress? What's next?</i></p>
<p>➎ <b>Celebrate</b> the growth, <b>Sustain</b> the change achieved, then define next, <b>elevated</b> growth goals.</p>	<p><i>Let's spend some time reflecting on your success in addressing your goals. What will you do to sustain the changes you've made? What is your next level of growth? How can I support you?</i></p>

### Three Examples (of applying a coaching method):

Here are examples to illustrate coaching in action. These are not full conversations; they are meant to emphasize the leader's use of questions (rather than lots of telling), then listening intently to walk the direct report through to their next steps.

#### *Example #1: On the spot problem solving.*



Quick coaching

*Employee: "In 15 minutes, I've got a meeting with my colleague who has been defensive every time we talk. Can you offer me some tips?"*

*Leader: (allow employee to respond to the questions). Can you quickly share the typical situation? Can you think of ways you are interacting that seem to have set him off? So, what might be one to two things you can do a bit differently when you go in there to make it a better interaction? Give it a try. I think your ideas are sound (unless the ideas clearly won't work; then offer a tip). Let's talk more afterward.*

#### *Example #2: Ongoing one-on-ones for performance support.*



Performance Support

*Leader questions: "Since we're at the start of a new quarter, I'd love to hear how you're progressing so far this year."*

*Can you review your goals and describe how you think you're progressing? What are you especially proud of? What is a change you'd like to make to achieve your goals by year-end? How would that make your work more successful? What are some things you could do to get better in that area? Which make the most sense and you'd really commit to? How can I help? What are the first/next steps?*

#### *Example #3: Coaching for development/growth.*



Development and Growth

*“So, I know you wanted to talk about some career goals you have in mind. Let’s use some of our time looking forward at those goals. Is this a good time?”*

*So, how exactly would you like to grow in your work, let’s say over the next one to two years? Great, tell me what makes this the path you want to pursue. What things have you already done to prepare? What do you think pursuing this growth will require? What might you do to get started? How can I support you? When do you want to check in again on the actions you’ve agreed to take?*



**Practice Activity:** Consider everyday situations you face with those who report to you. Think about how you can apply a coaching strategy in one of those situations. Maybe something like: “Can we debrief the new hire meeting you lead last week?” Or “Can we talk about how you are working to build a better partnership with your colleague?” or “I’d like to hear your ideas to address the low achievement of the three students in your class” or “I’d like us to talk about the reports that were due two days ago.” Or....

a) How might you prepare for this conversation?

- b) What do you need to pay attention to as you have the conversation?

**Coaching shifted thinking:** *“I came in thinking about myself and finished thinking bigger--about my Whys and the Whys of others.”* –short-term coachee, age 28, tech specialist

#### **4. From telling and advising to listening and inquiring**

It will be an adjustment for some to stop talking so much, and instead, listen deeply to guide your staffers to becoming more resourceful and capable. Few employees have the opportunity to explore their thinking to help them arrive at new insights. You can provide them that opening as a coaching leader.

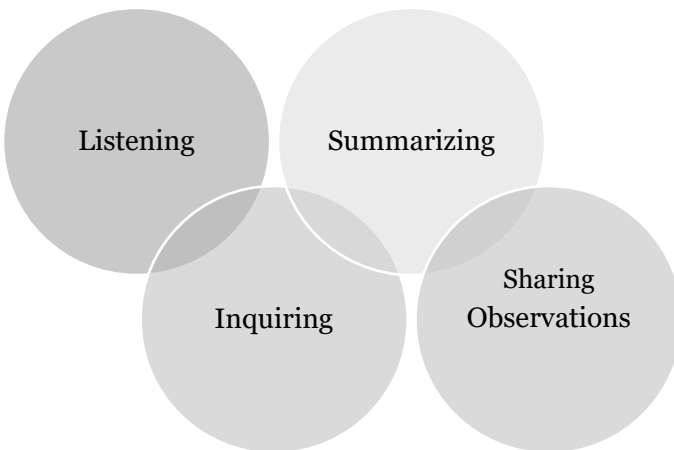
**Listening goes beyond hearing.** It requires letting go of preconceived answers, which leaders tend to have about what people should be and do. Listen for words, emotions, and alterations in thinking so you can, through thoughtful follow-up questions, prompt your people to discover new possibilities.

Spending time asking quality questions should not seem like an interrogation. Your aim is not to listen to respond but rather to understand fully. And, since coaching is more easily described



than executed, you want to get good at inquiry, so as issues arise, you can sense which questions might deepen, redirect, or expand your staff's thinking.

When assuming your coaching leader role, your speaking functions are largely asking, summarizing, and sharing observations. Most of the time should belong to your direct report (think 75%), while you listen to hear what's said and what's not. Your input is largely *listening* to prompt better inquiry, using good questions, *summarizing* and paraphrasing to reflect back what you've heard. Wait until after the direct report has explored their own thinking in depth to occasionally offer your *observations*. They don't need you to rescue them but will appreciate your occasional observations. **The graphic below represents your four basic coaching inputs.**



**Coaching impacts personal life too.** Two direct reports each shared with me the difference coaching made with their teenaged sons. Both staffers began to do more asking about their son's thoughts; in both cases, the sons were surprised and seemed awkward at first. *What do you want to accomplish today? Huh?* After a few days of questions, he said *I want to complete... talk to my teacher about...etc.* Same story with the other father with his two adult sons. He learned to ask and not tell, informally coach and not boss his adult sons. He observed a newfound patience which this required of him and the positive results and the reduced defensiveness of his sons.

**So, what about advice?** It has a place, when used sparingly.

*“The principal danger of advice giving is that it can be a self-administered aphrodisiac, doing more to satisfy your ego than to help your client [direct report]... so whatever advice you give, be brief.”<sup>9</sup>*

Advice means giving ideas about what works best. For example, a supervisor might say: *When you give your next presentation it's always best to wear business attire, start with a humorous anecdote, use your hands a lot, give a few self-deprecating remarks to make people relax, etc.* Clearly, that's what the person giving advice would do. The dilemma with advice is that the giver is sharing what works for *them* in *your* situation.

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<sup>9</sup> Bacon, T. and Spear, K. *Adaptive Coaching*, 2012, p. 198

Will Smith summarized it well in *Will*, his 2021 memoir: “Advice, at its best, is one person’s limited perspective of the infinite possibilities before you. People’s advice is based on their fears, their experiences, their prejudices. At the end of the day, their advice is just that, theirs not yours.” (p. 99)

The well-intentioned advice giver generally fails to consider what might work for the other person’s style, background, mindset, etc. And, if anyone reading this has teenagers, what typically happens when you give advice? They, at best, pretend to listen, then they act on *their* instincts and thought process.

**Asking for, but not needing, my advice.** I recall a coaching client insisting he needed my opinion (another word for advice). I asked him to think his challenge through, and he came up with nothing. He wanted to know what I would do, so I then said: “I don’t think giving my own advice is best, however, what I’ve seen people do in the situation you’re facing is to do this or that, etc.” What did he say? “No, that won’t work; I think I’d be better doing xyz.” .... Advice wasn’t very helpful.

When your staffers present scenarios that may have them stuck, use questions such as: *Can you take a moment and think about some possible options? In similar situations, what have you tried that might work? What attributes or strengths do you have that might be helpful in this situation?*

As a coaching-leader, encourage team members to brainstorm with you, to create a list of options; some may be good, some may be not so good. Usually, the person comes up with at least an option or two that you likely would not have given them; they come up with options that suit their style and background. Will these options work? They'd have to try them to know that. You can agree to check back a few days after they've tried their best option and talk through what worked and what didn't.

*When is advice useful?* There are occasions when advice is helpful. Some of those could be: 1) when the person has a limited repertoire of experience to draw upon, 2) when they ask directly; though be brief and refrain from advice that comes totally from your experience, 3) to help staffers explore alternative paths (which is not the same as specific advice), 4) when your direct report is planning their goals and actions and you want to be sure their plans line up with performance expectations. In this case, to keep the work focused and on track to high performance, there should be specific, direct and often non-negotiable goals or tasks and 5) occasionally, when there is no time for processing approaches; later, you'll want to share the reasoning behind your advice in that situation.

And yes, I've given advice and you will too—based on the circumstances. On occasion, and after the person has explored their options, I may give advice if they still believe they need it. You might put the advice in the form of a question, such as: *Your plan seems solid; would it help if you wrote down what specifically you are going to say to Jim before going in?*

**30 sample coaching questions.** Here are 30 questions for your use or to stimulate you to generate your own. These are largely open-ended questions which enable people to interrogate their own thinking, gain insight and draw better conclusions. Do not use *pretend* coaching questions (those with built in biases or that suggest a right answer) or questions that don't sound natural coming from you. For more ideas, there are plenty of leader-coach questions on the Internet.

**☑ Check any of these coaching questions that could work for you:**

1. What's the main thing to make our time most valuable today?
2. What would you like to leave our conversation with?
3. What do you think is at the core of this issue? (the cause)
4. What has worked well before that you might build on?
5. To get the best results, what would you do differently or better?
6. What are some choices for addressing the situation?
7. What would you like to leave our conversation with?
8. What's to gain or lose in your proposed scenario?
9. Are there other ways you can look at this?
10. If you brought the best of yourself to this situation, what would that look like?
11. In what ways do you think you contributed to this situation?
12. What can you do to create the very best outcome possible?

13. What else? What else? Anything else?
14. What do you believe makes you think about it that way?
15. Who will be affected by this option? Harmed by it?
16. What excites you most about this?
17. What impact is this situation having on you? On anyone else?
18. What did you consider doing, but didn't?
19. What's at stake with each option?
20. What are you trading off if you take that course?
21. How do you feel about your options?
22. What are the benefits that make it worth the risk (if any)?
23. Can I offer a few more options for you to consider?
24. Which of your strengths can you engage to help address this?
25. What if you do nothing?
26. What could you be missing or avoiding?
27. How have you successfully handled similar situations before?
28. Will this get you where you and the organization need to go?
29. What might get in the way as you follow your action plan?
30. What are the very first steps you will take to be more successful?

**Use of closed-ended questions when coaching.** There are, at times, advantages to using closed-ended questions (those with a direct Yes or No or when there is a small set of options for specific responses). *The power of a closed-ended question lies in its ability to help the direct report be definitive,*

*make a clear choice, confirm commitment, i.e., get to the bottom line.* Examples of powerful closed-ended questions when coaching your direct reports include: *Is this something you are really committed to act on? When will you do this? Who is responsible? Is that the best use of your time?*

Practice using questions that are appropriate for the situation. They should not be disruptive to the flow of the conversation, and they should feel seamless, logical, genuine and natural.

**A case of an un-powerful question.** This happened during one early conversation with an effusive, affable client. After 10 minutes of his steady flow of words, he said “Does that make sense?” without pausing for an answer. He did this twice more before I gently interrupted (as he took a breath). I asked whether he was aware of his habit of asking that question which didn’t seem to be seeking a response. As we explored this habit, which he often used with his direct reports, I asked him what he wanted that question to do for him. He had no answer. He realized it was nervous insecurity rather than a genuine request for input. How can you make it more effective? He responded: *Use it less frequently. Pause if I really am seeking input.* After doing that, his staffers began sharing their thoughts, which they hadn’t before. This improvement pleased them and him.

**5. Become a master of providing quality feedback**

Coaching, generally speaking, is developmental and *future-focused* regarding employee performance. Another application of the coaching style is to provide quality feedback, information of *past behavior*, both positive and corrective. Unlike developmental proactive coaching (with its future-focus), feedback coaching shines a light on *past* behaviors and supports direct reports in determining what behaviors should be continued and which may need redirection.

**Feedback is simply *information* that helps us know if our actions are ‘on track’, whether we are moving closer to or further away from our target.**<sup>10</sup> There are three main types: *reinforcing* (confirming, positive), *redirecting* (disconfirming, corrective), and *none* (neglect).

*Everyone needs feedback regularly and well-executed.* Unfortunately, many leaders’ beliefs and insecurities interfere with their ability to give (and receive) feedback. Some fear providing feedback, or they offer it so poorly that it fails to accomplish what good feedback can. Some worry that feedback won’t land well, so it’s withheld. Others, wait until they build up a list of infractions before sharing it, resulting in hard feelings. Then there are those who, even in the face of positive behaviors, withhold confirming feedback. Still others withhold feedback of any kind, whether direct reports are doing well or

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<sup>10</sup> Zenger & Stinnett, *The Extraordinary Coach*, P. 199



not so well. *This display of indifference is the worst approach to feedback.*

**Developing your feedback muscle will give you greater value to your direct reports.**



**Reflection: Beliefs and intention matter.** Take a few moments to explore your thinking about giving and receiving feedback.

1. What are your feedback habits (whether offering positive or corrective information)?

2. What beliefs might be holding you back from giving more positive feedback?

3. What attitude might be holding you back from giving more corrective feedback?

4. What, generally, are your intentions when giving feedback?

5. What is a recent situation in which you wanted to give better, more useful feedback? (Keep this example in mind as you review how to improve feedback skills.)



*The consequences of no or poor feedback.* Since providing staffers with abundant, quality feedback is crucial to their performance and satisfaction, withholding it can sound like: *“Wow, if I had known I would have addressed that sooner, rather than keep doing the same thing.”*

**Downside of receiving no redirecting feedback.** *“I wasn’t performing well in a role. This was frustrating because my supervisor seemed uninterested in my success. This supervisor would not or could not give me actionable information to help improve my performance – very frustrating. Fortunately, a mentor was able to give me enough feedback about my blind spots, which enabled me to turn things around.”* –Interviewee, mid-level leader

In my work with leaders and colleagues who’ve reported being stunned when placed on a performance improvement plan or released, it’s like a mantra: *“I had no idea that the way I was working with (fill in name or group) was that problematic.”* My response: *Didn’t you receive feedback long before now?* Their reply went something like this: *No, not really. I heard something once months ago, but not since. So, I thought things had improved.* The feedback was either missing or not provided well. And there was likely a bit of the leader’s refusal to face the truth or inability to read the handwriting on the

*wall*. This makes effective feedback even more important, even when it hurts.

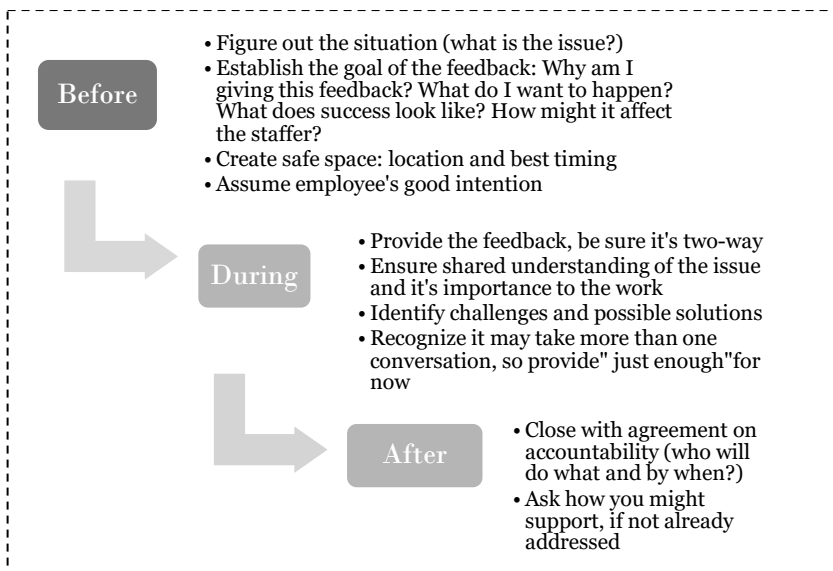
**Confirming feedback boosts motivation.** A mid-level, 30-something leader revealed she received feedback at the close of her first two weeks on the job. Her leader let her know what a great hire she was, then went on to give specifics about what she'd seen so far: *You offer great ideas, your skill in building systems and tools is sorely needed in our department, your way of giving ideas to push my thinking makes you worth your weight in gold*, etc. Then, an added surprise was when the leader asked: *Am I making your experience a great one? Do I move too fast? Do you feel you have what you need so far? What else can I do?* Afterward, the direct report said she was ready to give even more to do her job very well.

*Tips on providing quality feedback:*

- ☑ Reorient yourself around the *benefits* of feedback.
- ☑ Remember, feedback is ongoing. Behavior change requires many conversations. Habits are pesky, but not irreversible. So, keep at it, acknowledging incremental growth.
- ☑ Know it's a two-way process, a conversation that includes good advocacy and inquiry to foster better understanding and best actions going forward.
- ☑ All feedback should be about behavior, not the person.
- ☑ The more trusting the relationship (the CONNECT key), the more likely the feedback will be valued.

- ☑ Be specific about the behavior and the *Why*—its impact on the job or people (whether positive or corrective feedback).
- ☑ Provide it in a timely manner. Set aside a private time for more complex or difficult feedback.
- ☑ Apply balanced feedback, that is, more positive than corrective. An ideal ratio is at least 3:1 (positive/corrective)
- ☑ Practice and build comfort giving feedback regularly.

**A general feedback process:** Below is an example of how to give good feedback developed by a group of mid-level leaders. There are many books that address feedback, so think of theirs as a non-scientific, but good, example.



### A feedback example



*"I'd like to get your thoughts on how the project is going, and then, I'd like to share and get your reaction to some feedback."*

Sample conversation questions: *Can you review the project goals? What's worked well? Where did*

Feedback	<p><i>you get stuck (if at all)? What are you thinking about doing differently?</i></p> <p><i>Here are a few thoughts on what I observed... (share what went well and what can be improved). Any reactions? (Listen to understand before responding).</i></p> <p><i>So, what things will you do to move forward on the project to help ensure its success? In what ways do you need my support?</i></p>
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**Taking Action for Better Coaching:** Below, list

four behaviors, actions or attitudes you commit to take related to applying a coaching style to help maximize the performance and satisfaction of your staffers.

Action, Behavior or Attitude tasks	Timeline to start
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

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This closes *Chapter 12, The Coach Key*. Chapter 13 builds on coaching as it looks at other ways to Develop your direct reports' talents and skills to enhance performance and grow their careers.