COACHING THE UNCOACHABLE

Coaching is an essential skill because it is a primary duty of every manager and supervisor. You will spend the majority of your work time helping employees improve performance by coaching them in virtually every work setting. You may occasionally coach them on their conduct outside of work if their personal conduct interferes with success at work. Managers will tell you about the great satisfaction they feel when an employee grows from unsatisfactory to outstanding because of their coaching.

We typically feel that success is the result of the *"right person in the right job"* with proper training, coaching and rewards. Such an attitude is naïve. Some employees are coaching resistant and others are not candidates for coaching at all. Managers do not have enough time to spend it working to save the wrong people from termination. Those who migrate to the casualty list are:

- The Pacer
- The Unmotivated
- The Know-it-All
- The Character Flawed

THE PACER

The Pacers have only one speed – neutral. They have a self-regulating internal governor that determines their level of productivity and they work at a pace we call *"enough to get by without getting fired."* They are capable, well-trained, and understand the business, but work is a means to earn a living and they have no vision of greatness. They have no desire to be a star or do anything special. Promotions, plaques, and accolades do not interest them. They arrive on time, with their reusable plastic lunch box in tow, and make sure their workspace is totally cleared five minutes before the end of their shift. No overtime and no special projects for them.

Jordan has received a "3" on his one-to-five performance review scale for the past three years. This year you decided to give him your best coaching pep talk and included how you recognize that he has an abundance of knowledge and skill that he could use to help the company and himself. Although he listened politely and thanked you profusely, he let you know that he has a family, hobbies, and other interests, that are equally important to him. He is satisfied to do a "good" job and enjoy the level of work/life balance that represents his ideal of a quality life. Jordan is part of Generation X, where life quality is high on his personal agenda, while you are a Baby Boomer, who knows it takes extra effort to make it to the top.

Unfortunately, Jordan's attitude is shared by as many as 60% of the workforce. He does enough to get by, resists coaching, and is settled into that large pool of employees who will be the first to go when the economy turns and downsizing comes. The leaders knows which employees give extra effort and make the greatest contribution. There are never any guarantees, but those are the employees who are most recession proof. Jordan may resist your coaching and feel he is doing okay, but his future includes the potential that he can be quickly expended and he would be well-served to accept coaching and do something to be memorable when his contribution will decide his future during difficult economic times.

THE UNMOTIVATED

It is important to know that every employee is motivated. The problem is they may be motivated to do something that is not consistent with the success of your business. The job could be only a means to another career, pay tuition in a private school for the kids, buy a new car, or get out of the house for the day. They do not care about what kind of work they do. Just assign something and they will do it.

At review time, you decide to talk about an individual development plan. You want to know what the employee sees for career growth and are deflated when you hear the employee tell you he/she is looking forward to only one thing – retirement. A few of the most frustrating employees will add the exact time – four years, three months

and two days. Jeez! How do you coach these employees, who are retired on the job? The obvious way is to ask the employee to plan to work forever, just in case life throws the kind of curve that makes it necessary to work beyond the anticipated retirement date. Sometimes, that approach can work, but do not waste too much of your time on it. Keep in mind that 20% of your employees want to be superstars, want to be coached, and will respond to your efforts. Don't fall into the trap of trying to rehabilitate people who do not want to improve, by spending 100% of your effort working with the wrong employees.

THE KNOW IT ALL
Whether you are explaining a change you feel will improve the presentation of your Sales Rep, or how to cover her territory by the most efficient route, Ms. Know-it-All already knows that. She wastes no time telling you she already knows what you are telling her and she believes her approach works best. Her self-image is flawed because she is a poor listener and refuses to engage in self-examination. She is emotionally immature and naïve. Criticism of her work is internalized as "*He is jealous*," or "*He doesn't like me*." Her know-it-all response is a façade. She lacks emotional maturity and is not able to accept your coaching. Other know-it-all employees who are uncoachable, discount you or your advice for irrational reasons. As outrageous as it sounds, the reason may be gender, "*What does a woman know about shipping and receiving?*" Or, it may be age, especially if you are a decade or more younger than your employee. It may even be race or economic status – "*That SOB (Son of the Boss) thinks he knows everything.*" Children of owners may have a credibility issue they do not deserve.

Noah was encouraged to avoid making jokes during his sales presentations, but responded that he knows his jokes "*loosen up the customer mood.*" He should have been jolted into reality when his jaw-dropping story about a same-sex couple brought the ire of a longtime customer, who railed about him to you. Expecting him to be remorseful and apologetic, he responded by saying that the customer is just an "*old guy with no sense of humor.*" Should you coach him? I don't think so. Save your energy for that superstar who deserves your time.

THE CHARACTER FLAWED
Of all the frustrations you will ever face in management, the worst is recognizing that you have hired a person with a character flaw that makes it impossible to coach the employee toward success. The most frequent character flaw seen in the workplace is lying. Lying appears to be easy for the character-flawed employee. He can look directly at you and tell you something that is not even remotely related to the truth. He swears he is 90% finished with a project he has not even started. He tells you he is in Des Moines visiting three customers, but he is actually in Kansas City with an old girlfriend. He had the GPS on his phone blocked to keep you from tracking him.

Can you imagine the surprise when the President found his Director of Business Development at a hotel in a nearby town with a person who was not his wife? He had no answer for why his car was there more than ten times in the last 60 days. The source of the information? The husband of the other woman and a Smartphone camera. The resolution? Termination.

Character flawed employees take too much energy to manage them. They are gamesmen (or women) and "swear" you gave them instructions different than you remember. They are masters of getting rid of delegated work. They may claim they are loaded with work, they do not know how, or they will take the project and mess up because they know you will take it back. They do not care why you take it back; they just want to be sure you take back your delegation.

When Carlton was hired, he told the company he had many successful years of experience working with Quality Improvement initiatives, but could never got the process off the ground for you. He always had an excuse, including lack of quality staff. After two frustrating years, you hired quality improvement employees you could trust and took back that delegation. The result? An executive coach was hired to help Carlton effectively manage his business unit, but it did not work because Carlton has a history of working for companies until they catch on

that he is a fraud. You are still kicking yourself that you could not find out more about his past and no one would tell you he is a master of fraud. His resume shows he moved from one job to another often and you even asked yourself why? Now you know.

A fatal character flaw is dishonesty. Some cheat on time by padding hours or claiming to have worked many extra hours just to get a day off with pay. A frequent method of cheating is to claim reimbursement for business lunches that never happened or mileage never traveled. The dishonest employee will take money and products. They will take kickbacks and divert incentives offered to the company for purchase of products. The dishonest will find a way around the security system and leave the warehouse with products or parts. They will also run a competing business on the side.

Terry was in for a huge surprise when he was called to a large steakhouse restaurant to service a refrigeration system. Employees were frantically working to move out perishable products. They were especially concerned about 500 pounds of aged beef. What a relief when they learned Terry had a refrigerated truck they could rent for $35.00 an hour while he repaired their system. He never expected the owner of the restaurant to tell his boss how grateful they were that Terry was able to let them rent his refrigerated truck while he repaired their system. Uh-oh! His company does not have any refrigerated trucks and Terry's side business was exposed. The resolution was obvious and Terry's boss wished him the best when he turns his rental business into his only income because his employment there was over.

Employees with character flaws may beg for another chance when they are caught and agree to do whatever you ask. Actually, they are uncoachable because their issue is not behavior; it is a broken ethical core. On occasion, a concerned employer will confuse management with ministry and try to "save" an employee with ethical problems. It is a mistake.

FOOTNOTE…
Is it true that some employees are uncoachable? Yes, it is. In the educational sports arena, the coach works with every athlete to be sure he/she is in the correct position and is properly trained. Once the athlete enters the game, coaching continues until the final buzzer sounds. But, at the end of the day, even the most renowned coach must accept that some athletes resist coaching and soon will be transferred to another school where he/she can *"get more playing time."* The business manager parallels the athletic coach. It is a waste of time to continue to coach the uncoachable. Just allow that employee to move to another employer where he/she may be more successful.

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