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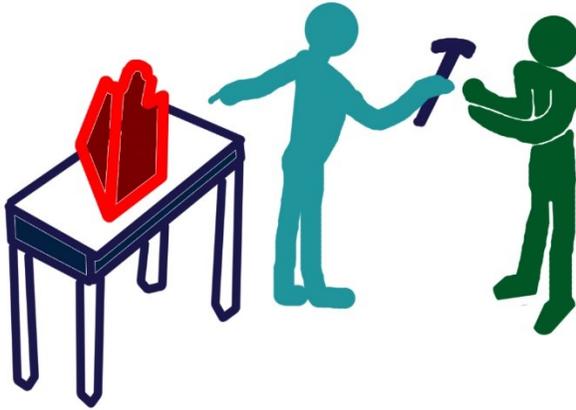
A BATTLE PLAN FOR TODAY'S BUSINESS

E-Book Excerpt

HIRE EMPLOYEES YOU CAN COACH

By Ray Martin

Hire Employees You Can Coach

Here's the difference between a coach and a teacher: a teacher puts new knowledge into the mind of a student, whereas a coach identifies potential that is already inside, and draws it to the surface where it can be used. In track and field, for example, a teacher could impart knowledge about technique, but only a coach could identify the specific potential already inside an athlete and work with him/her to maximize it.

This is why it is so important to find and hire the kind of people who can be coached. Let's put this in perspective. In Chapter 4, I detailed the importance of defining jobs and making their steps clear and unambiguous. This goes a long way in teaching employees how to do the jobs they have been picked for in a way that almost guarantees complete success. In the previous chapter, I talked about self-starters, those rare few who have the motivation and courage to take on new initiatives of their own volition.

Being coachable, however, is something that all employees, regardless of their tendency to be self-starters or followers, can benefit from, since coaching pulls the best parts of a person to the surface, even if they did not know it was there.

This is why job candidates must understand a company's core philosophies and values before they're hired, and why they must be vetted for their level of coachability. A manager must make sure to invest in people with potential, and to weed out those who might get better over time, but who rarely do.

It is easy for a hiring manager to start the coachability vetting process by using one or more of the application questions as a filter. This will make it possible to ask questions that will reveal key attributes such as:

• The willingness to do what is needed to grow into the job

• The level of desire for personal improvement

• The willingness to take ownership of actions once hired

• The potential to fit in with co-workers

As opposed to specific questions to ask, the key principle here is the ability to listen for cues such as whether a candidate is able to "get over the past," or whether they are open to admitting failure – both key elements in determining coachability.

Once candidates clear these initial hurdles, they are in a more suitable position to be both hired and coached, in order to bring them to where they need to be. A candidate is the best person to tell a manager what motivates him/her, and the manager is the best person to listen. The manager can then honestly assess a candidate's strengths and weaknesses, and can coach accordingly. A coach cannot take people where they themselves have not been.

The best coaches are willing to let go of the reins a little, to guide people instead of pushing them, and let them do things on their own. They have to share the big picture, and be clear about what piece of that big picture belongs to the candidate. A coach only sets expectations, and does not lay out a step-by-step guide of how to get the job done. That requires a certain level of humility. The coach remains the leader, and the temptation to express an opinion can be strong, but this must be resisted for fear of shutting down the whole conversation.

People who coach from the heart allow themselves to be vulnerable when managing employees. People who are willing to admit they don't have all the answers or who are willing to allow another's opinion to prevail will see their employees pay back with twice the loyalty and devotion.

A coach can continue to raise a level of trust by consistently giving the students a reasonably low level of guidance. This is what builds rapport and motivates the employee in order to maximize their effectiveness and tap into natural strengths. A coach focuses on being ready with the right questions, not all the answers. By contrast, those who micro-manage performance stifle growth and increase the chances that employees will remain dependent.

Over time, the coaching style of leadership always bears fruit. When a manager does not have to direct every move and orchestrate every level of initiative, it frees up time to apply effort where it will reap the best results.

Finally, one more aspect of leading as a coach that I believe is important to remember for the overall success of the company, is that in some ways it resembles a medicine: a little of it is good when necessary, but if it continues too long it becomes an addiction for both parties, and its effectiveness wanes.

A coaching style of leadership should never be self-serving; coaching is not about the coach. It's about managing employees and helping them to become leaders in the company—letting them grow on their own, and at their own pace.

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SIDEBAR: Coaching

I have found, as a leader and manager of employees across the country, that there is more than one way to coach. In addition to the formalized face-to-face approach, I have found that an awareness of one's own leadership style can be a key success factor. One of the worst forms of leadership—and a style guaranteed to stop productivity and generate unhappiness for everyone—is the "Do as I Do" method.

Setting the pace and expecting others to perform exactly the same way can be an extremely negative style; it's just as negative as outright coercion. I have always set high standards for myself, but I give others latitude in how they do their job. I share my vision, and try to lead by example.

Leading by example creates clarity and lessens the need for hierarchy. You find that some people will step up and some won't. Those who step up will make a huge difference in the company, and those who don't will cycle out naturally. When an environment is created where these things become possible, where people can self-motivate, those who aren't efficient—the people who don't fit in—eventually leave and the team performs at an ever-increasing level.

We believe that everyone needs to do a fair share of the work and we believe in giving people the room to succeed. This does not fall into the usual manager model of a person managing other people, simply filling time with no concrete personal tasks.

Do we have a shortage of managers? Maybe. But do we believe in trusting people and giving them the opportunity to succeed? Yes.

Will that exceptional person succeed better than they could anywhere else? I strongly believe so. Ultimately, it is

up to each one of us to decide if we want to be that exceptional person.

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