

# **ROSS**GROUPTRAINING



***STELLAR PERFORMANCE:***

**“ARE YOU A COACH OR A REFEREE?”**

If you're a manager-coach, you're ensuring that your employees are experiencing as much success as possible. If you're a manager-referee, you're waiting for your staff to make mistakes so that you can run interference, call a penalty and tell the person what they should have done in the first place.

"The key to ensure that employees are being successful is to track their progress to make sure that as a boss you've set clear goals for them, and that you're aware of when they accomplish those goals and, just as importantly, that you celebrate the accomplishments and successes," said Jim Concelman, manager of Leadership Development, Development Dimensions International. "If you find yourself as a boss not doing much celebrating, people aren't being successful."

This celebration can consist of bonuses and verbal acknowledgement in staff meetings and the company newsletter. "The recognition and celebration can be inexpensive and easy. It can also be a bigger deal as well," Concelman said. "In some research that we've done, we've found that the number one reason people leave an organization is that they don't feel appreciated, and that's from the U.S. Department of Labor. Another survey shows that 65 percent of people said they did not get any recognition in 2003. So, it doesn't often take a lot. It's just a matter of recognizing when someone's been successful."

There are two ways to recognize people, Concelman said, for an accomplishment or for effort. "If as a leader you find yourself recognizing people more for accomplishment than effort, you're being successful. If you find yourself recognizing effort, you might want to take a look at how well you're coaching people."

In order to enrich your coaching skills or to become a proactive coach, you should view coaching as a process rather than an event. It's an opportunity to observe people, watch their accomplishments and then provide good feedback and recognition. In contrast, referee coaches see coaching as an event or, "something wrong happened, now I need to intervene." Concelman laid out a few steps to become a proactive coach.

"First, set clear goals for people, not necessarily for a particular event but over time," Concelman said. "You might call it performance management. The second is to observe their behavior, observe what they're doing so that if you see an opportunity for coaching, you can act quickly. Number three is to help them be



successful without taking over. And that sometimes is one of the hardest things for a boss to do, to frankly take a bit of a risk that you're preparing this person and that they can handle it. Four is provide appropriate feedback afterwards, hopefully positive feedback, but if necessary, provide that coaching for improvement if things didn't go exactly as planned."

Providing positive feedback is easy. Who would quibble at hearing a few words of praise for their work? To check in on your employees' progress without appearing to micromanage is a bit trickier. "The key is to set the expectations up front when you're coaching for success," Concelman said. "Part of helping people be successful is to give them the interim steps along the way that they should be doing. So if you help somebody identify a process for being successful, identified milestones or progress points, it's natural for you to ask how things are going and to get an update."

In order to be successful in today's competitive business market, organizations need their employees to do things right the first time. "Referee bosses create what you might call a trial-and-error environment, and that's costly to companies," Concelman said. "I don't know many companies that find their way to success through repeated failure. Companies today simply can't afford to have that failure on the front line. It's critical that coaches help people do things right the first time. If you look at the questions in the manager's quiz, we've oriented a number of them around that. The fifth one, 'It's better to let people make a mistake. They'll never make the same one twice.' In today's environment, organizations can't afford that type of a philosophy. The difference between success and failure is too thin of a margin today to allow that to happen."

"A lot of leaders tell us they're too busy to coach for success. And what we find when we dig a little deeper is the reason they're so busy is because they're not coaching for success," Concelman said. "They're busy fighting fires that could have been prevented so they could be doing other things that are moving the business forward. In this era of total quality improvement, coaching for success is a critical element because it helps prevent problems and allows leaders to do more of what they need to do to make the organization successful."



Try taking the Manager's Quiz to see whether you're a referee or a coach for your employees. Answer true or false to the following questions:

- ⑩ My employees learn more from navigating a task by themselves, so I stay out of their way.
- ⑩ There is no time to meet with people before every task, so I wait for them to come to me for help.
- ⑩ I always assign people tasks that I know they can handle without my assistance.
- ⑩ I meet with people once, tell them how they should handle a task and then let them handle it. They'll come see me if they need more information.
- ⑩ It's better to let people make a mistake—they'll never make the same one twice.

If you answered "true" to any of these, you are at risk of becoming or may already be a referee boss. To correct this type of behavior, Concelman recommends speaking with your own boss to ask for coaching tips. "That can be risky," he said. "A lot of leaders learn to be referee bosses because their boss is a referee boss. So the first I would do is assess my own relationship with my boss and say, 'Is this a person I can go to for help and support in how to be a better leader?'"

If asking your boss for coaching tips isn't an option, the next step is to ask the employees for input. "The key question is, 'Am I helping you be successful and what can I do differently?' In other words, you're asking them for coaching," Concelman said.

