Learning, Coaching, and Mentoring: Tips for Managers

Overview
Tips for managers on how to provide opportunities for learning, coaching, and mentoring to employees of all ages.

- The business case for learning, coaching, and mentoring
- Providing opportunities for on-the-job learning
- Encouraging coaching relationships

Studies show that learning, coaching, and mentoring are key factors in retention, job satisfaction, and engagement among employees of all ages. In this article, you'll find tips on how to provide opportunities for learning and development among the people you manage.

The business case for learning, coaching, and mentoring
The business case for learning, coaching, and mentoring is significant.

- Retention. “Learning is critical for retention,” says Jennifer Deal, the author of Retiring the Generation Gap: How Employees Young and Old Can Find Common Ground. “In fact, when we asked about what an organization needed to do to retain people, people told us that learning was just as important as compensation was. People at all levels of an organization understand that they need to continue to learn and develop to remain viable and valuable in the work place. So they’re invested in learning.”

- Job satisfaction. Studies show that training, mentoring, and personal development are key contributors to job satisfaction.

- Employee engagement. Opportunities for learning, growth, and development -- through frequent feedback, training, coaching, and mentoring -- are key drivers of engagement at work.

Providing opportunities for on-the-job learning
“What people want to learn at work is what they need to know to do their job well,” says Jennifer Deal. “And what they need to learn to be able to move into the next position. We have found that people actually want to learn on the job more than any other way. So managers should really try to take advantage of that fact.”

Here are some ways to provide opportunities for on-the-job learning:

- Temporary assignments. Put people in temporary assignments either within the department or with another department.

- Project teams. Have people serve on project teams for purely developmental reasons, not expecting the person to be a significant part of the project team. Just being on the project team helps the person develop.

- Shadowing. Provide opportunities for individuals to shadow someone they can learn from -- another employee they can follow around for a period of time in order to learn, better understand the job, and ask questions.
• *Working with others with different skill sets.* Working with others with different skill sets helps you learn and grow. For example, pairing someone in marketing with someone in research or product development can help each of them develop skills that will improve coordination across divisions.

Remember, too, that it’s beneficial to provide opportunities for learning outside of work. For example, if possible, you might give employees release time to do volunteer work that will expand their skills, either in an area they’re already proficient in, or in an area where they might learn new or different skills.

**Encouraging coaching relationships**

Employees of all ages benefit from being coached and from coaching others. “More than 85 percent of people in our study thought coaching would be useful for their own development,” says Jennifer Deal. “And everyone, regardless of age, has something to learn and something to teach.”

Here are some ways to foster coaching relationships among the people you manage:

• *Arrange for people within your organization to coach each other.* Remember that you don’t necessarily have to go out and hire coaches for people to get coaching.

• *Encourage bi-directional coaching rather than uni-directional coaching.* Uni-directional coaching -- which tends to be hierarchical, top/down, older/younger -- is often less effective than bi-directional coaching, where the coach and coachee roles switch back and forth. We all can learn something from someone of another generation -- whatever our level or tenure with the organization.

• *Encourage coaching relationships that are a generation removed.* For example, pair a Baby Boomer with someone from Gen Y. “Pairing people further apart in age lets them take advantage of the differences in experiences,” says Jennifer Deal. “I’ve seen younger people have a great time helping older ones negotiate their way through whatever the new technology fads are. And I’ve seen older people be of great help to younger people in helping them understand how to deal more effectively with office politics.”

Finally, don’t forget about getting coaching for yourself. We all need learning, coaching, and mentoring throughout our careers.

The content of this article is based on a 2009 Ceridian podcast presentation by Jennifer Deal, a senior research scientist at the Center for Creative Leadership and the author of *Retiring the Generation Gap: How Employees Young and Old Can Find Common Ground.*

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