

# HUMAN RESOURCES

*A Joint Venture supplement with the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario*

## Coaching unlocks employee talents

As every manager knows, one of the most difficult tasks in any organization is helping each employee understand how his or her job relates to the bottom line. That, however, is just the first step. The next challenge is helping them focus on ways they can help improve overall organizational performance and productivity.

"Creating those processes and fostering that kind of continuous improvement culture is one thing all the great performing companies share," says Jan van der Hoop, CHRP, president of The People Factor Inc. of Oakville, Ont., and a member of the HRPPO.

"It starts with an understanding that answers don't just come from the top. In fact, much of a company's knowledge base often lies on a much lower level.

"In any industry, the front-line troops — those who deal day in and day out with customers and suppliers — have an enormous wealth of knowledge and experience. The trick is to unlock it and then apply it to operations."

Helping organizations unlock that knowledge and experience is Mr. van der Hoop's business. He is a human resources coach. Companies hire him to show how coaching can involve staff on almost any level in improving overall performance, productivity and profits. They bring him in to first coach and then train key staff members in coaching techniques, then help identify areas where coaching will yield the most benefits.

Finally, when all the elements are in place, his final job is to help the organization kick-start what should become a continuous process of coaching.

"One of the great benefits of coaching done correctly is that the coach is not an ongoing corporate feature or expense," says Cynthia Calluori, president of Cynthia Calluori and Associates of Toronto, a prominent coaching firm. "Good coaches derive their satisfaction from teaching others, from enabling their clients to create a self-sustaining culture and process."

The process is what counts in the end, they say. Coaching is not a one-shot project but, rather, a continuing commitment to help all employees be the best they can be, not just in their own jobs but also in the insights and suggestions they contribute to help the organization prosper.

"One of the truly great benefits of coaching is that it becomes a motivator," Ms. Calluori says. "Money is seldom the main motivator for people. Giving each individual that feeling that their opinions are valued, that they are members of a team, that they can make a difference — those factors are far more effective than just paying them a salary or a wage."

One problem for business today is a new focus on productivity brought about by intense competition in the marketplace. It leaves little time for contemplation, Mr. van der Hoop says.

"Recent downsizings have eliminated entire layers of middle

management. They have forced a new work paradigm. Organizations feel they can't afford to allow for non-productive hours. People are too focused, too pressured to get the job done to contemplate, think, interact and discuss."

Unfortunately, it is likely those non-productive hours that, in the past, allowed individuals the breathing space to examine what they were doing, to think about better ways to accomplish tasks, and to reason out how improvements could be made and the impact those improvements might have on the bottom line.

Coaching, Ms. Calluori says, "creates that breathing space[and] encourages individuals to look inside themselves and to look around them. It stimulates them to begin a continuing process of thinking about how they and others do their jobs, and whether there are ways to do those jobs better. It is a voyage of self-discovery."

That voyage can take place in one-on-one situations or in small groups, Mr. van der Hoop says. The importance is not in the numbers but in creating a relaxed atmosphere where participants feel comfortable enough to discuss issues and ideas freely.

"The goal is to help individuals find their own answers," Mr. van der Hoop says. "The coach's role is to inspire them and to help them deliver their own insights, and then apply those insights for the betterment of the organization."

That fundamental concept of enabling employees to find the answers is what separates coaches from consultants, Ms. Calluori says. Consultants tend to give advice — advice that can find considerable resistance when it comes to employees acting on it. The coach, however, enables employees to identify and create their own solutions.



Human resource coaching helps employees contribute to the cause.

What comes from within usually has greater and more widespread acceptance than what comes from without.

While changes in the way organizations do business has created an unprecedented demand for coaching cultures, the new technology tools embraced by those corporations make adopting that culture easier, Ms. Calluori says.

"In the past, knowledge was often power. What information technology has done is make knowledge readily available right across organizations," she says. "Individuals can now access data, surveys, all kinds of information

that enables them to create and substantiate suggestions for improvement. If encouraged to think beyond the box, they have the tools to do it."

Another advantage of coaching is that it is of benefit to almost everyone within an organization, not just executives, Mr. van der Hoop says. But he notes that the most successful corporations are those where senior managers have been trained in coaching techniques or come naturally to it.

"If you look at highly successful organizations, almost all of them have a coaching culture," he says. "That is because there is a direct

and measurable link between continuous coaching and bottom-line results. In those organizations, it is not just managers who are driving the business. Everyone realizes they have a stake, and everyone drives the business."

Mr. van der Hoop suggests an example of what may be the best known example of successful coaching. He cites John F. Kennedy's inauguration speech, where the president challenged all U.S. citizens to, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

That single phrase captures the basic philosophy, he says. "Coaching encourages people to ask: How can I make a difference?"

**What** HRPPO Conference: Coaching in Organizations  
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**Where** HRPPO Education Centre, Toronto

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