

Coaching The Know-It-All



One of the toughest coaching challenges is coaching the person who thinks he or she knows it all. They don't want help and they certainly don't want coaching. Maybe they do know something, but they certainly know less than they think they do and they could benefit from coaching, if they were only willing to accept it.

Even managers and supervisors who are normally very adept at coaching have been frustrated by these types of individuals.

What do you do with them? Give up on them and let them be? They may be high performers and/or hard workers, which is why you may not want to encourage them to find a job elsewhere because they do know how to do certain things capably and they are useful to the organization – just not as useful as they could be. Hard workers could grow faster and high performers could reach higher.

Which kind of resistance are you dealing with?

Resistance to coaching comes in two forms:

Passive resistance – The person appears to be open to coaching, but keeps breaking appointments for coaching sessions and putting it off, citing apparently legitimate reasons.

Active resistance – The person makes it very clear he or she does not want the help that is being offered, and they make no bones about the fact that they believe they don't need it.

The reasons behind the resistance

The next step is to try and understand the reason behind the resistance. Here are some possible reasons:

Lack of trust – The person doesn't trust you – or doesn't trust you enough – or feels you don't respect him enough (if there is some history between you, another person may be in a better position to do the coaching).

Bad past experiences – The employee may have had a bad experience with coaching in the past, when despite accepting coaching help, he or she still didn't get a desired promotion. Or, alternately, they believe they'll get the promotion anyway, and they don't need help to get it.

No buy-in – The person may not have bought into the process; they have a blind spot about their own shortcomings.

Start asking questions

Whatever the reason, don't be put off by the resistance and define what the issue is in your view. It's time to be upfront about your intentions. For example: "I'm concerned about this aspect of your performance and I want to help you achieve your goals this year." Then start asking questions.

You might ask:

- "I've noticed you've put off our meeting a couple of times – how can we make you feel more comfortable about going forward?"
- "Do you feel anything might be holding you back?"
- "How can we solve this problem together?"

Start building trust

Coaching can feel like punishment, since it's out in the open that there are certain performance problems, so the person may be somewhat defensive. That's why it's important to start building trust and to make it clear that punishment is not the goal here.

Show that you're worthy of the person's trust. Start by praising the person's contributions. Tell them you're on the same team.

Important: Show that you're committed to follow this process through to the end. You'll remain involved and stay at the employee's side until he or she has solved this problem – you're committed to the person's long-term success.