

How to Give Direction and Coach at the Same Time



In this article you will learn how to give direction and coach at the same time. This is one of the more difficult balancing acts in leadership and it is crucial to the best results.

The emphasis in this article will be on *giving direction* because they way leaders make decisions, set expectations, and assure

accountability significantly impacts the ability to coach effectively. If you want to learn more about coaching methods, click on the link below to my last article/video.

Giving direction, coaching, and results

Both giving direction and coaching are necessary to foster empowerment which leads to better profitability, productivity, and customer satisfaction and reduced employee turnover. Studies have also shown that either extreme of avoiding decisions or over-emphasizing setting direction will undermine empowerment.

Challenges to giving direction effectively

A major challenge is that every situation calls for a different balance of direction and coaching. This is made even more challenging because the human brain is programmed to leap to negative conclusions in reaction to power differentials. Even highly trained professional staff may automatically assume that a particular decision means things they care about will be hurt or that the intent is to control. While these concerns must be explored, reactivity easily leads instead to unproductive arguments or withdrawal and passive resistance.

Subtle shifts in a leader's language or tone are important. For example, stating "I made this decision and you need to do what I ask." is likely to lead to higher risk of reactivity than saying "I made this decision even though I know you disagree. I am sorry about that and want to explain why I felt this was necessary as well as explore ways we might address your concerns." Research has indicated that having power over others can pull any leader, regardless of values and skills, out of such personalized attention and caring into talking more and listening less.

So, if we care about empowering others, our state of mind, tone of voice, and choice of words all count. This is why self-awareness and self-management are so critical. Leaders are always on stage and have to learn to recognize when they are triggered into unproductive communication patterns.

Six principles for giving direction in ways to enhance coaching

Here are six additional principles for giving direction in ways which enhance the ability to coach effectively.

1. Make sure the organizational vision includes the type of work environment you want to create.
2. Establish team norms or guidelines for communication which enable wide participation, openness, honesty, and effective management of conflict. Make it clear the norms apply to you as well.
3. Go first in regularly asking for feedback about your own behavior. Acknowledge your mistakes.
4. When you offer ideas in discussions as opposed to asserting direction, be sure to ask for questions, disagreement, and alternative ideas.
5. Sustain clear, consistent decision making. Always consider consulting others before finalizing decisions.
6. Make and explain decisions according to how you feel they promote the vision. Acknowledge downsides and risks. Elicit reactions and set into motion problem solving to address concerns.

Perfecting the art of leading for empowerment

Below are links to additional references which offer more guidance about these principles. Leadership for empowerment is a demanding practice because of the constant shifts required between placing our attention on others and attending to our own vision, sense of priorities, and obligations. The best results require life-long practice to perfect this art.

References

- Coaching methods
 - [How To Coach When There Is No Time](#)
- Setting team norms
 - [An Easily Missed Ingredient for High Team Performance](#)
- Feedback and going first
 - [Vulnerability, results, and leadership](#)
 - [Teamwork as perpetual feedback](#)
- Clear, consistent decision making
 - [Are flaws in decision making causing conflict and poor alignment?](#)

About Neil Baker M.D.

Neil Baker M.D. works with organizations to enhance leadership and team impact through *In-the-Moment Leadership Strategies*. This means using any work situation, even the most complex and difficult, as an opportunity to achieve immediate impact on quality of work relationships and on progress toward results.

He has developed these approaches as a leader, speaker, consultant, and executive coach for 30 years. Past positions include serving as Director of Psychiatric Inpatient Services at the

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