



Performance Coaching Flexibility: Every Great Manager Has It

Part 11 in a 12-Part Series on Helping First-Time Managers and Seasoned, But Untrained, Supervisors Transition to Effective Leaders

While performance review considers the whole body of work, effective coaching requires looking specifically at the task or assignment in question.

About the Supervisory Basics Article Series

The transition from an individual contributor to a supervisory or managerial role is one of the most critical and difficult career moves.

Representing the largest pool of management talent in most companies, supervisors prove critical to an organization's success. Companies that develop superior leaders in these supervisory positions can execute more effectively than their competition.

This article, *Performance Coaching Flexibility: Every Great Manager Has It*, is based on Module #11 from [The Supervisory Basics Series](#), a 12-Part Series on Helping Individual Contributors and Seasoned, But Untrained, Supervisors Transition to Effective Leaders.

The Supervisory Basics Series consists of 12 individual yet linked two-hour modules, delivered in leader-led or eLearning formats, helping managers understand the management behaviors and tactics required to ensure their own and their company's success.



More information on The Supervisory Basics Series can be found at the conclusion of this article.

Listen to the Supervisory Basics Podcast Series: *Tips for Managers and HR Professionals on Helping Individual Contributors Transition to Effective Leaders*. [Available on iTunes](#).

iTunes

"It does very little good to try to 'motivate' an employee in an effort to influence good performance when they don't have the ability."

—Dr. Julie White, *People Leave Managers – Not Organizations*

Introduction

Effective performance coaching is a critical managerial skill. A leader needs to clearly understand what his or her direct reports are asked to do, and help give their team the confidence that they can accomplish those tasks and responsibilities. In order to do this, the new manager must accurately diagnose the employee's performance needs and then adopt a complimentary coaching style that meets those needs. New managers who can't be flexible and adaptable in their coaching style can't hope to meet the variety of performance situations that come their way.

Identifying Performance Needs

First, the new manager needs to break the employee's performance down into specific tasks—effective coaching requires this step. Once the performance issue is identified in task-specific terms, the second critical step in effective coaching is diagnosing the employee's performance level. An employee's performance level can be broken down into:

- **Results:** Performance results as they relate to acceptable standards for anyone in that specific job function. Are the employee's performance results well below standard, below standard, at or slightly above standard, or consistently well above standard?
- **Ability:** Does the employee have the skill to accomplish the task at the acceptable standard? Could he or she do it if they had to? Often supervisors will confuse enthusiasm, potential or capability with ability. Ability refers to current performance – not the ability to learn to perform. If the performance issue is a true ability problem, then anything other than training will not suffice – and even cause more difficulties.
- **Attitude:** The combination of the employee's *confidence* (to learn and/or work independently) that they can accomplish the required performance and the employee's *commitment* (desire) to accomplish the required performance. For a manager, an employee suffering from a lack of confidence and one who is just not committed to the job can look the same: they can both lack initiative, seem hesitate, and wait to be told what to do. Yet, determining the difference between confidence and commitment issues is critical in determining the right coaching style.

"I'm only one boss away
from another job."

—Management
training participant

Coaching Styles

Now that you have diagnosed the results, ability, and attitude of your direct report, four performance levels are possible. Each level has an appropriate corresponding coaching style.

- **Performance Level 1:** Performance results are below acceptable standard – employee might or might not have the ability – and lacks commitment and/or confidence for the task.
Coaching Style: *Structure*. This style provides high amounts of structure, teaching and direction and little involvement and autonomy.
- **Performance Level 2:** Performance results that are below acceptable standard – employee might or might not have the ability – but has commitment for the task and the confidence to learn and perform.
Coaching Style: *Structured Involvement*. This style provides a high amount of structure and direction and high amounts of involvement, and participation—but not autonomy.
- **Performance Level 3:** Performance results at or above the acceptable standard – employee has the ability to perform the task – lacks either commitment for the task or confidence to do the task independently – or both.
Coaching Style: *Involved Autonomy*. This style provides low amounts of structure and direction and high amounts of involvement, and some autonomy.
- **Performance Level 4:** Sustained superior performance for the task – possesses the ability to perform – and has both commitment for the task and a high level of self-confidence.
Coaching Style: *Autonomy*. This style provides very low structure and direction, moderate involvement, and high autonomy.

Conclusion

Over the past several years, there has been a common trend of minimizing or avoiding management or supervisor behavior that is directive in nature. However, for some tasks, employees may need teaching, training and structure, and the correct use of directive types of behavior is not only helpful but necessary. That is why it is important for new managers to be able to accurately diagnose performance needs and then use the appropriate coaching style, rather than coach from their own “comfort zone” or preference.

In the next article (article 12 of our 12-article series), we will discuss initiative and delegation – specifically, the skills used for creating initiative, preventing upward delegation and effectively delegating appropriate tasks.

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If you enjoyed this article, please [visit our website](#) to access other articles in this 12-part series on Supervisory Basics.

About the Supervisory Basics Series

The [Supervisory Basics Series](#) is based on extensive analysis of the competencies required of transitioning individual contributors and seasoned, but untrained, supervisors. This series provides the knowledge, tools and skills to immediately establish a leadership role and helps participants understand how to avoid the typical traps of new supervisors and managers.

The Supervisory Basics Series helps managers understand the management behaviors and tactics required to ensure their own and their company's success. The result is managers establishing themselves in a legitimate position of power, inspiring superior performance and promoting open, effective communication.

Supervisory Basics also helps beginning managers avoid common new manager traps – lack of clarity in expectations, ineffective communications, not establishing personal power and failing to move from “doer” to leader. Such negative behaviors lead to absenteeism, low morale, and lost productivity and customer loyalty, as well as increased attrition.

The series consists of 12 individual yet linked two-hour modules, delivered in leader-led or eLearning formats. Companies can choose flexible implementation, including an integrated 3-day series, stand-alone sessions, mix and match, and external facilitator or train-the-trainer options. Participants will learn to build credibility, establish legitimate position power, earn personal power, “manage up,” understand legal basics and conduct purposeful workplace discussions. [Download the brochure.](#)

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