

Your Coaching Is Only as Good as Your Follow-Up Skills

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No matter how successful a coaching session feels while it's underway, if it doesn't lead to change after it's over, it hasn't been effective. Unfortunately, too many managers don't adequately follow through and thereby squander the important time they've invested in coaching. You can make the process more effective by adopting these practices after every session.

Use this list of tips and questions to help you track the progress of everyone you're coaching. It will help you offer meaningful support in follow-up meetings, as well as in between meetings.

Right after the meeting:

Write things down. You won't remember everything you see, hear, and think about your employees' progress, so write it down in a dedicated place. You might consider using a standard template to capture this information. Good notes will allow you to give more meaningful feedback as you move forward.

After each session, ask yourself:

- What can I do to support this employee's development between now and our next coaching meeting?
- What did I learn from this meeting that I didn't know going in?
- What did the person I'm coaching learn? What key messages were reinforced in the meeting?

Ongoing:

These tasks should become a routine part of your management practice, if they aren't already. Schedule time on your calendar to work on the tasks that are most difficult for you to remember or complete.

Follow up on agreements. Review your written agreements periodically, and follow up on action items. If members of your team have requested specific help from you, make sure you're getting them what they need.

Observe signs of growth. To give meaningful feedback, you need to know what's going on. Make a deliberate effort to observe the kinds of interactions or tasks your team members have prioritized in your coaching sessions.

Check in directly. Institute an explicit open-door policy that encourages your team to come to you with questions. Knowing they can seek help may motivate them to persevere when they feel stuck.

Communicate impact. As you see people begin to change and grow, communicate the impact of their growth explicitly. Hearing it from you will increase their motivation (and give them satisfaction).

Watch for changes in the relationship. Pay attention to the emotional dimension of your interactions. If you sense a worrisome shift, intervene early. Even if you can't do anything to help, your concern will probably be appreciated.

Evaluate yourself. Periodically assess your own performance as a coach by asking yourself these two questions:

- Am I meeting the needs of each person on my team? Approach your role with a trial-and-error mentality and show openness in making adjustments along the way. Periodically check in with everyone you're coaching about what is working and what is not — but trust your judgment.
- Am I holding up my end of the bargain? Coaching is a two-way street, so be honest with yourself about whether you're getting in the way of people's progress or sending mixed messages about your expectations. Do what you can to make everyone on your team more successful.

Of course, the task of following up never ends: lending support and providing accountability are the perpetual tasks of a manager. As you get more and more comfortable with coaching, you may no longer need a list like the one above. But keep it around in case you want a refresher.

This is one of ten tools that are included in the [HBR Guide + Tools to Coaching Employees](#).