

Encouragement, the Key to Coaching

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People always wonder about the best way to coach phone reps so that their organization can deliver world class customer service. If you want your reps to improve, you must understand the performance issues, know how to break down any problems into manageable steps and then encourage the reps on their path to improvement. The key ingredient is encouragement.

Most of us are very good at giving feedback and very good at pointing out what we want changed. We are aces at criticizing. We may even say things like, “Do it, if you want to keep your job,” assuming that this “kick in the butt” approach will work. When people feel threatened, it may motivate them for the short term, but certainly not over the long haul. It will never lead the organization to being a world class service provider.

Managers and supervisors need to be encouraging as they coach for performance improvement. It is not sufficient to assume that people know they are doing a good job at improving—that no news is good news. They must hear encouraging words. Otherwise, the new behavior, the fire within the person to improve, extinguishes itself. It has no fuel to keep it burning brightly.

Dr. Rudolph Driekurs, the famous behavioral psychiatrist, said that one of the most powerful ways of building self confidence is encouragement. It moves people from feeling “they can’t” to believing “they can.” The old axiom of “Nothing succeeds like success,” could not be truer.

Be aware that praise is not the same as encouragement. When we praise someone, we make blanket statements about performance. “What a great job!” “You’re the best!” “Good work!” These types of statements can be mistaken as insincere flat-

tery. Encouragement, on the other hand, focuses on what you have noticed is different and better. “When you paused at the ends of your statements just now, your enunciation was so much clearer.” Or “You have made so much progress in slowing down. When I listened in on your calls this week, it was easier for me to follow what you were saying.” Encouraging statements show that you have clearly paid attention to what the reps have done. It makes them realize they are on the right path. Ultimately, it makes them work harder.

There is always a temptation to attach a negative statement to something positive. “This is working well, but you still need to change your attitude” “Your responses are appropriate, but people still can’t understand you.” When we sandwich the positive between something negative, the positive pieces are all but erased by the “but.” It makes the person still feel inadequate. A better approach is to separate the negative statements from the positive completely. “I have really noticed that you have been on time two times this week. I know it hasn’t been easy getting your toddler ready. As you know, our customers start calling at 8 am so it is important for you to be here on-time every day. On the days that you are on-time, perhaps there are things that you are doing differently, like taking an alternative route or laying out your daughter’s clothes the night before. If you could identify what is different, my guess is that you could eliminate this whole tardiness issue completely. Can you give it a shot?”

Encouragement is a critical component for any supervisor or manager aiming for world class service. It makes employees feel empowered and appreciated for their good efforts. It results in a stronger, more committed workforce. The Hudson Institute in their well-respected *Workforce 2000* Report said that the foundation of our national wealth is really its people. They are the primary assets of any modern corporation.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.