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Consultancy, Coaching and Development

Put the Coach before the Courses:

May 16th 2000 was Learning At Work Day and the focus was Coaching - a skill that is no longer the preserve of Senior Managers.

Personal effectiveness requires coaching and feedback, and the latest research suggests that this can be best achieved by extending training to all levels of staff.

You have a deadline looming and a member of staff interrupts you with a long-winded account of a problem he or she is having. Do you:

1. Listen absentmindedly but carry on working?
2. Stop what you are doing, invite them to sit down and tell you all about it : You will meet your deadline by working late?
3. Give them you full attention for 5 minutes, then explain you have a deadline and arrange to meet them later so that you can discuss it properly?
4. Not allow this kind of thing to happen : you always close the door if you are busy, to prevent disturbances?

For many employees (3) would probably be the sanest response. But lets suppose you chose (2). Your colleagues might notice that you have started to work late and that you are getting your work out irrespectively.

Do they give you feedback on your behaviour?

Does someone act as a coach and plan ways for you to be an effective listener without having such a negative impact on your life?

Do they simply ignore the situation?

Companies are realising that coaching and coaching skills should no longer be the exclusive property of Senior Managers. Unless everybody has the ability to give and receive feedback, it is difficult to embed a culture of continuous improvement. This is especially important for Line Managers. I have gone further than this and in my book *Power Up Your Mind*, I suggest that everyone needs to have a “learning friend” who can give us feedback and help us to work through difficult issues.

To underline the importance of the issue we commissioned research into the benefits of coaching from The Institute of Management. The results make interesting reading. A third of all Managers would like to improve their own personal effectiveness by being coached but only 19% of organisations have a formal coaching programme in place.

Almost all of the Managers (95%) agreed that feedback was essential and 93% agreed that coaching should be available for all staff. 80% thought that they would personally benefit from coaching and 80% agreed that coaches needed some training before they started to coach other members of staff.

The implications of the survey could hardly be clearer. Managers want more people to receive coaching. They see it as a successful way of improving effectiveness.

So why is it not happening? Is it a question of size? Not according to the survey. Is it too time consuming? Again not according to the results. As so often in corporate life, it seems to be a problem of mind setting rather than resourcing.

According to work undertaken by the TUC coaching roles can be developed at all levels within an organisation. We know too that, when dealing with basic skills, a comment from a colleague may be less threatening than one from a Manager. Equally, where Line Managers are coaching, as part of their role, communication and performance improves.

Bill Lucas is Chief Executive for the campaign for learning and author of Power Up Your Mind, Learn Faster - Work Smarter.

Further Information:

For more information on The Learning At Work Day and try the on-line Coaching Skills Quiz visit www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk

Bill Lucas's book Power Up Your Mind, Learn Faster - Work Smarter is available from Nicholas Brealey Publishing at a cost of £14.99.
For more details call 020 7239 0360.

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For further information on The C.I.P.D. please telephone 020 8971 9000 or visit the web site www.cipd.co.uk.

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