Create a Coaching & Mentoring Culture

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**WHAT IS A COACHING/MENTORING CULTURE?**

When a coaching approach is the key aspect of how leaders, managers and staff engage and develop within an organisation, then that organisation is said to have a “coaching culture”. David Clutterbuck, one of the key authors on this topic, defines a coaching culture as one where “Coaching is the predominant style of managing and working together, and where a commitment to grow the organisation is embedded in a parallel commitment to grow the people in the organisation”.2

An organisation with a “coaching culture” generally exhibits a high level of personal engagement and responsibility. There is a predominant belief that you get the most out of people not by telling, but through engaging. It is not an end in itself – it is one part of an overall culture of continual learning and development to enhance the capacity of individuals and the organisation as a whole.

Evidence suggests that leaders and managers that adopt a coaching style are better able to delegate and motivate. Team performance lifts and leaders are allowed time to focus on important tasks and decisions. So it is not surprising that many organisations aspire to a “coaching culture”. But cultural change is always difficult, and creating and maintaining a coaching/mentoring culture within an organisation requires focus and commitment. “When you create a culture of coaching, the result may not be directly measurable in dollars. But we have yet to find a company that can’t benefit from more candor, less denial, richer communication, conscious development of talent, and disciplined leaders, who show compassion for people”1

**HOW TO CREATE A COACHING/MENTORING CULTURE?**

1. **Link to Mission and Business Strategies Espousing**
   The importance of a coaching/mentoring approach to building talent in the mission and key business strategies ensures that all levels of the organisation understand the importance of cultural change. Peter Hawkins3 suggests that the coaching strategy must be strongly grounded in an organisation’s mission, plans and people development policies.

2. **Start at the Top**
   Enrol senior leaders in executive coaching programs to refine their leadership and coaching skills. Consider team coaching for leaders on how to create cultural change. Establish an ongoing “Advanced Skills” program to continually build on existing knowledge and competence. It is critical that senior leaders are the role models for the organisation in establishing a coaching culture.
3. Invest in Training & Skills Development
Whether operating a formal coaching or mentoring program, or encouraging a coaching/mentoring approach, training is critical. Most people do not naturally adopt a coaching style. Training will help both senior and junior staff to understand their role within a coaching/mentoring relationship, and to adopt coaching tools and practices that will make their relationships and communication more effective.

4. Harness Coaching Talent
There will be managers within the organisation who are naturally gifted at developing talent. Harness this asset by establishing an internal panel of Mastercoaches who are trained to tutor less able peers in coaching skills and can act as an upward coach to more senior managers. External coaches can be a useful resource for ongoing development and learning for internal coaches and mentors. Where external coaches are used, the panel members should be carefully recruited and assessed against criteria that derive from the coaching strategy.

5. Develop Evaluation Strategies
With all formal coaching and mentoring programs it is essential that objectives be set at the outset and outcomes assessed to allow for ongoing improvement. In the less formal “coaching culture” ways must be found to assess when and where coaching/mentoring is happening and how effective it is. Without ongoing evaluation and correction the culture may shift over time.

6. Review & Reinforce Regularly
Regularly bringing coaches and mentors together for practice review and ongoing skills development is important to retaining a healthy coaching culture. Such reviews can be particularly valuable prior to regular appraisals. Refreshing coaching/mentoring skills will help managers to conduct appraisals more effectively and deliver greater value to the individual and the organisation.

7. Reward Good Practice
Developmental performance should be a key assessment criterion for all management positions. Ideally developmental performance would be integral to succession planning and bonus schemes. Not only is it important to reward good practice, it is also important to avoid sending the wrong message by promoting managers who do not invest in the development of others.

8. Identify Cultural & System Barriers
What excuses are being used to not adopting a coaching/mentoring approach? Time will always be high on this list. Reluctance to address behavioural issues and unwillingness to admit to weaknesses may be other difficulties. Once identified, it is possible to address these barriers with time management training, individual coaching or motivational campaigns.

9. Adopt a Mentoring Program – but ensure it meets ISMPE standards
Internal mentoring programs are an excellent way to embed a coaching/mentoring culture at all levels of the organisation. However it is important to ensure that the program adopted is aligned to the International Standards for Mentoring Programs in Employment (ISMPE). In particular focus on ensuring that both mentors and mentees clearly understand the purpose of the program and receive adequate and appropriate training. Both formal and informal mentoring opportunities exist in organisations with a strong coaching/mentoring culture.

10. Engage a steering / planning group
Having a group of people accountable for coaching/mentoring will ensure initiatives are well designed for the organisation and work as part of an overall strategy. For initiatives to flourish, an internal ‘champion’ or group of champions help keep mentoring and coaching alive.

CONTACT US
To find out more about how we can help you implement best practice coaching and mentoring in your firm, please contact:

Melissa Richardson
Director, Horizons Unlimited Pty Ltd
M +61 418 971 609  |  T 1300 88 40 49
E: melissa@horizonsunlimited.com.au

Alex Richardson
Director, eLearning
M +61 406 737 422  |  T 1300 88 40 49
E: alex@horizonsunlimited.com.au

REFERENCES