

CORRECTIONAL COACHING:

Teaching Managers to Be Coaches

By Jeanna Gomez

What is correctional coaching and why is it needed? Correctional coaching has the same methods and goals as other popular forms of coaching, such as personal coaching, life coaching or corporate coaching — all widely recognized and accepted methods of achieving personal and professional goals. Coaching helps people use their skills to reach their highest potential. Just like a sports coach, who provides support, guidance and leadership, a life coach also can help people articulate and realize their goals and ambitions while learning skills that endure long after the coaching ends.

Correctional organizations can use correctional coaching to build and maintain an atmosphere that attracts dedicated people, optimizes performance and retains those who are committed to the goals of the organization. It is the most effective way to improve employee relations, improve morale and retain staff. A few of the many reasons for keeping good employees are:

It is cost effective. It costs a large amount of money to recruit, interview, hire and train new employees. According to various correctional agencies, it costs an average of \$25,000 to \$30,000 to obtain one employee.

Employees are more productive. There is a huge investment in time and energy from existing managers and staff who must train and guide new employees. Frequent turnover means their other assigned duties are either put aside or they work longer hours to complete them. This can pose problems both at home and on the job.

There are financial and recognition benefits. Many companies and organizations have specific priority programs, practices and specialties that may be shared with other companies or organizations, resulting in a lowered profit margin.

It creates stability for all. High morale and stability (including the maintenance of corporate history and extensive knowledge of policies and procedures) are byproducts of the retention of good employees.



Attracting and Maintaining Staff

Correctional organizations are no different than other organizations or companies in their need to retain committed employees. In corrections, the safety and security of offenders, staff and the community are at stake, so it becomes increasingly important to keep knowledgeable people who understand the population they are tasked to secure. The longer a person is in corrections, the more opportunity that person has to increase the ability to secure that particular environment. Job longevity in corrections offers an increased understanding of the potential downfalls when dedication to the job is lacking. Therefore, retaining dedicated staff is important to the overall purpose of corrections.

The concept of “meaningful” work continues to increase in importance among those in the work force — as well as the importance of a collaborative environment and attention to the balance of work and life. Today’s workers want to feel acknowledged, appreciated, recognized and compensated for their efforts. Because generations have different approaches and needs, the methods for recruiting and retaining young and up-and-coming correctional employees must change.

Both the language and philosophies about employment have changed, and correctional managers must explain the benefits of corrections differently and help create an excitement about the field. It is important to remember that motivation is directly related to morale; when morale is high, people are motivated to stay on the job, directly benefiting the organization.

As a correctional coach, the goal is to listen for the opportunity to guide employees into solutions that benefit the correctional setting and help the employees establish goals to accomplish the solutions.

Understanding what is important to the next generation of correctional workers is vital to creating positive morale. They definitely want to know “What’s in it for me?” when they consider staying at a job, and the corrections field must know what they want. If corrections rewards staff members with something they do not value, the organization will suffer. Teaching managers to be correctional coaches is one method to accomplish the recruitment and retention of the next generation of correctional employees.

What It Takes

Coaching is not the same as counseling. Coaching is action oriented, involving setting and reaching goals. Coaching identifies the problem, comes up with solutions that benefit both managers and staff, and plans for the future with consistent follow-up. Coaching is a structured process that helps staff learn tasks. It is about working with people to show them new possibilities and helping them take actions that were not previously obvious to them. It fosters understanding and respect for the opinions of others. It teaches listening skills and increases self-awareness by helping people tune into the thoughts of others and not be afraid of new ideas. Coaching also is about increasing positive relationships with employees, decreasing hostility and defensiveness, and reducing stress and negative emotions among correctional employees and managers.

In a coaching role, the manager achieves a clearer understanding of his or her own commitments to the organization in a way that increases positive relationships, develops new possibilities, reduces waste and increases effectiveness. Managers increase their understanding of the organization and its interpersonal dynamics in a way that helps them achieve positive results. Managers become more effective as leaders by understanding the concepts of coaching and its empowerment for themselves, their employees and the organization. When organizations introduce coaching concepts to managers and staff, there is a collaborative effort to reach positive goals for the agency and a development of unity and team spirit that enables powerful work relationships.

To be an effective correctional coach and help staff become the future leaders in corrections, managers must have the following characteristics:

- Sincere interest in the success of employees;
- Ability to help employees design the blueprint for their career in corrections from the beginning of their employment;
- Willingness to guide and mentor employees;
- Ability to provide advice on a career in corrections;
- Ability to develop opportunities for practice and self-development;

- Willingness to give employees the same respect that they wish for themselves;
- Willingness to commit to a long-term relationship;
- Motivation to navigate employees through the organization’s road map;
- Willingness to be a partner in employees’ success;
- Willingness to challenge themselves to do the same as they expect of employees;
- Ability to motivate their team; and
- Leadership skills.

Communicating with correctional staff is a key component to succeeding in coaching — and this also means having good listening skills. Coaches must actively listen, without interrupting. They must have patience, give their full attention, use open-ended questions to get more information and be tuned in to what their employees are saying. This cannot be done if employees are not getting their manager’s undivided attention. As a correctional coach, the goal is to listen for the opportunity to guide employees into solutions that benefit the correctional setting and help the employees establish goals to accomplish the solutions.

Correctional coaches must be excited about the goals they are assisting their employees to define and ultimately meet. This originates with the managers’ confidence in their own success. Coaches also must believe that coaching is positive and will help provide guidance for others.

The Correctional Coaching Process

The coaching process begins with training the manager in the concepts of coaching. Training programs used should be provided by a certified professional coach, and an understanding by the trainer of corrections and criminal justice would be an added benefit for the agency. During training, the managers should also be taken through the coaching process in order to establish their own professional and personal goals and create a road map to reach them. This will assist them in recommitting to the correctional agency and will also help them effectively verbalize their vision to their staff members.

In order to have an effective coaching program, the process should begin when the staff member is hired. During his or her initial training, the introduction of coaching is important in order to plant the seed that the agency and managers are committed to the employee’s career in corrections. Initially, there should be weekly meetings with the employee in setting his or her goals within the agency and beyond. This will lead to a more effective performance evaluation. As the process continues, monthly and quarterly meetings should occur, unless there is a need to coach on a new issue. All too often, managers will identify the issue to be addressed but will not assist the employee in deter-

mining how to resolve it nor give feedback on progress. This could lead to performance disaster. It is important to provide ongoing support meetings with the employee in order to provide feedback on his or her progress. This shows that the manager is committed to the employee's success. Remember the new generations need this type of guidance and this is important for retention. It is important to include the following in the process:

- Establish your vision or mission as a manager within the organization;
- Verbalize and share the vision with your staff;
- Observe staff performance;
- Ask your self as a manager, "Does the behavior meet my vision and the agency vision?";
- Identify and define any need areas;
- Share the observation of possible new goals for improvement;
- Allow for self-assessment of the behavior. Remember to give your employees a voice;
- Come to an agreement and brainstorm solutions together. Come up with one to try;
- Set well-defined goals for changing behavior;
- Create a detailed action plan, including steps needed, time frames, specific duties, people who will assist, etc.;
- Prioritize. What will be done first?;
- Set mini goals if needed;
- Monitor progress weekly;
- Provide feedback and encouragement; and
- Continue coaching and motivate staff toward success.

All employees can benefit from coaching in various areas of their career including performance improvements, career advancement, educational advancement, positive communication and relationship building.

As correctional staff are given a voice in their own goal planning, coaches showing a genuine concern for their success will empower them to continue the goals of the organization as well. Although managers provide structure in setting goals with employees, they also must remember to be flexible, because every employee is different. Finally, correctional coaches must provide support, give encouragement, monitor and validate progress, and celebrate their employees' success. Coaches know that employees' success is a reflection of the organization's success.

Most employees are eager to learn and improve their skills within their job. Regardless of whether they want to be more effective employees or want to move up, they will appreciate their coach's help. It is important to talk with staff about the changes that they want to make in their jobs to reach their goals (to better serve the agency and ultimately themselves). Coaches should learn what motivates their employees, what their career goals are and what they want to accomplish. If an employee does not know, it presents the correctional coach an opportunity to move the employee toward a more developed career objective in corrections. The coach should make a plan of action with each person and help the employees carry it out.

Correctional coaches must make it a point to spend daily time with each employee they supervise. Many studies show that a motivating factor for staying in a job is spending positive time with the leader of the group. A minimum quarterly performance meeting is important in providing support, feedback and review of an employee's progress toward meeting his or her career goals.

Leaders must be willing to take responsibility for their own actions and the actions of their employees and for reaching the identified goals. If a manager is not satisfied with the way the group is running, he or she has the power to change it. To be respected and followed by employees, coaches must be willing to step up to the plate, try new ideas and help staff take a risk in making changes.

As correctional coaches, managers have a powerful opportunity to make the work environment a positive experience for everyone. With the right approach, correctional managers can create and maintain good employees who will stay and continue the correctional purpose of providing safety and security to offenders, staff and the community.

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