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**COACHING**  
YOUR STARS TO BE  
**LEADERS**

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# Coaching your stars to be leaders

*Exceptional talent in any organization needs to be fostered as well as rewarded. Keeping the work environment flexible and training talented employees for larger roles can only help a company blossom.*

By Sheila Goldgrab

**A**re there enough stars in your organization? Are they shining as brightly as they can? Star employees can include your company's top-producing salespeople, executives who everyone wants to work for, or project coordinators who turns ideas into gold. They can be anyone who goes far beyond expectations, and who inspires others to greater success.

These organizational stars must be encouraged, because they are vital to the organization's development. They raise the bar for everyone. They are up-and-coming leaders, they model success and they pull the organization towards a successful future. This means that it is particularly important for these stars to be performing at their peak – and like anyone, stars have room for growth to be great leaders.

One of the best ways to get top performance from stars is through coaching them in leadership. This means expanding the individual's capacity to be an effective leader. A coach, according to the International Coach Federation, is "one who helps people set the best goals with clarity and purpose and achieve them; focuses people to quickly and easily produce results and provides the tools, support and structure for people to accomplish more." Coaches frequently work

with the organization's leadership model, as well as the individual's goals and values. They then use a variety of assessment tools to identify the gap between the two and assist in bridging that gap.

#### The trouble with "bosses"

Many stars find themselves held back by traditional management styles, which are based on the idea that management sets the direction and those lower down the ladder implement the decisions. This "boss" management style contrasts greatly with the manager who helps others better themselves – a coach.

Managers who coach:

- Promote discovery rather than provide solutions for others;
- Encourage others to self-manage;
- Continuously raise the bar by making big requests of others because they believe they can do it;
- Listen more than advise;
- Develop leaders rather than followers;
- Provide accountability;
- Acknowledge others for the contributions they make; and
- Model great leadership themselves.

Stars in particular need to be coached rather than "bossed," partly because of their personalities, and partly because of the nature of their work.



#### Why stars need coaches

Because of their competence, once you assign the project and agree on direction, stars will be able to find their own way. They will choose what steps are needed to reach the overall objective. What they may need from a manager is a sounding board, a good listener, a resource provider, and someone to partner with to reach developmental goals while getting the job done.

Also, consider the nature of the work, which is often highly specialized, with only the star and possibly some expert colleagues understanding it. In most cases, a manager who is a generalist would simply not have the knowledge to be able to provide close direction on what steps need to be taken to achieve the desired results.

A manager may be important, however, in helping stars see the big picture, through coaching. As specialists, stars may be tempted to burrow down some fascinating rabbit holes of enquiry and lose sight of the overall objective. Managers can prevent this by asking probing questions about how the star's work supports the larger goal. Due to their results orientation, they will likely be able to work out the implications for themselves.



### The coaching conversation

Coaching others is a conversation, not a briefing. It can be along these lines: “Here is the project and the expected outcome. What approach will you use? How will you leverage your strengths? How will this project prepare you for your next leadership position within this organization?”

This support can be provided through external or internal coaching.

An external coach is generally a trained professional, with an appropriate certification, engaged on a contract basis by the organization to work with individuals, groups or teams. This person’s role is to mentor, challenge, be a sounding board and provide a ready ear for those at the very top who have no one to talk to – with confidence that it will remain confidential.

Managers and other co-workers can also coach internally, on a less formal basis. However, it is important that a coaching relationship not conflict with the organization’s hierarchy and reporting structure. There may be conflicts of interest and breaches of confidentiality. There may not be sufficient trust for an internal coach to function properly.

### Training your stars to coach others

One of the most important roles of a star is to help others increase their performance. This internal coaching is one of the most important tasks for an organization’s stars – to pass some of that “star power” on to others in the organization. It might mean helping a rainmaker business developer grow the selling abilities of others in the organization, or helping a gifted designer pass skills on to others in the team.

This is particularly the case when stars are promoted into a higher management position. They may be slow to get to speed in an unfamiliar role at a higher level and will need help in building their effectiveness in their new work. They may need to spend time differently, less doing and managing and more time leading – which often means building their own coaching skills.

This will not happen by accident. Many star performers are so devoted to making themselves better that they may neglect the needs of others.

For example, consider a star senior management member with whom I recently worked. “Jonathan” was brilliantly intelligent and a leading light in an industry that valued his

leadership, his expertise and the results he produced. However, many of the people around him, who needed more direction, found him hard to work with.

He was unaware that his management style needed a well-rounded repertoire of skills to manage average performers. Like many stars, he had worked mostly independently without much direction, and so had not had much first-hand experience with the variety of management styles needed to lead people in his department. Also, he paid too much attention to immediate results instead of nurturing his people. Consequently, he was not attending to the development of his direct reports so that these people could learn and become leaders in their own right.

Managers can start transforming such situations by modeling - being excellent coaches themselves when dealing with all of those who report to them, stars or not.

Once stars see how you coach them, and once they receive some coaching, they can begin to use those skills to coach their direct reports or their teams. As mentioned before, this conversation should be founded on powerful questions that are expansive in nature, such as: “What is your intended result for this member of your team? How can you develop your members as leaders?”

A coach/manager draws out the best of an individual, establishes a workplace community that supports a high level of productivity, encourages self-discovery, and sets the environment for the self-motivation of others. Most importantly, in developing “star power” in others, a star manager who coaches is likewise able to train individuals to be great leaders.

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All of our professional coaches are trained and have significant experience coaching inside corporations and organizations.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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