

## COACHING STRENGTHENS COACHES, TOO

We usually think of coaching as a way for managers to teach. Recently I worked with a company whose support staff also began to coach. Their coaching strengthened them as a team and improved the efficiency of the organization.

The department provides support services for a large organization with many field coordinators. Folks in the field impose upon administrative support staff to bend deadlines and do rush jobs that make orderly work flow impossible. The support staff wanted to take more responsibility for improving their own situation.

The staff worked with me to learn a sequence of questions to engage field officers in joint problem solving:

- What is the problem that is the reason for your call?
- What other information do I need in order to understand your situation?
- What do you need to know about my situation?
- What are some options for solving this problem?
- What's the solution we can agree upon?

Before, when someone asked support staff member Karen to submit a late voucher for payment, she would say, "yes," and then stew about postponing other work. Her colleagues agreed that saying yes to unreasonable requests encouraged poor work habits in themselves and others, eroded morale and hurt efficiency.

Now Karen and her colleagues have a process for getting information, explaining the consequences of policy exceptions, and thinking through solutions. The whole process encourages field officers to share responsibility for their choices.

As a result of our work together, this support staff also decided to use part of their Friday staff meetings to strengthen their coaching skills. Each Friday they practice. Someone brings in a real incident for the group to role play, discuss and resolve.

This experience highlights the team building potential of a group confronting its own problems. They now apply a consistent problem solving process and they created a way to keep learning from each other. Because the team is in a subordinate position in the organization, they also coupled their own solutions with new dialogue with senior management.

This experience shows the potential for coaching. For while this administrative staff knows that they can't make other employees change, they can model and they can teach.

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## *A client writes...*

"You changed the whole course of what I want to do at work: communication is the key."

Ceil Timpone, Manager,  
Sweet Waters Restaurant,  
Burlington, Vermont