

SUPERIOR SERVICE



Coaching Champions

By *Bob Furniss, Touchpoint Associates*

Coaching is your most important role as a leader. Four principles to ensure that you're guiding your team to the championships.

Michael Jordan is perhaps the greatest basketball player ever. He led the North Carolina Tarheels to the National Collegiate Championship and won the NBA Championship with the Chicago Bulls six times in the '90s. Kobe Bryant, who is often compared to Jordan, recently won his fourth NBA title as a Los Angeles Laker. They both have one thing in common — a coach — Phil Jackson. I find it interesting that, while both Michael and Kobe have talent that is incomparable, they both needed a coach to reach the pinnacle of success.

Whenever I speak at conferences I often ask the audience how much time they would like their supervisor to spend coaching and mentoring their frontline employees. Their response ranges from 50% to 80%, which shows that most organizations have pretty high expectations that coaching is a manager's key role; yet, when I ask frontline leaders the same question, they often say that the reality is much lower.

Michael and Kobe receive the training necessary to succeed and have talent that is above and beyond the average player, but they still need a coach. Michael once said in an interview that Phil played an important role in his game. He said that Phil could see things he could not see — that he could "see the whole floor while I can only see what is in front of me." He knew that he needed a coach to give him correction and encouragement to make better decisions and play at a higher level.

Four Elements of Coaching Success

I tell the managers who attend my seminars that

coaching is the most important role you have as a leader. It is THE most important part of your day. If you don't have time for it, then you have to find a way to change your priorities to make it happen — and happen consistently. This following four elements will give you a little insight into what you should be teaching your frontline managers to do on a daily basis.

1. CREATE CLEAR MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

One of the toughest things to do in a call center is to create a consistent measurement of success for customer interactions. The attempt to do so typically mandates that a call center will move in-and-out of a program that seeks to make everything the same. The monitoring form generally is the measurement "yardstick" and it often is a moving target in the minds of the agents — because "good service" is not something that is easily defined.

There is a reason that McDonald's is the most successful hamburger chain in the world. They offer consistent food quality. How do they do this? They create consistent processes that are trained, implemented and measured across the world. When I order a Big Mac in Honduras or Ireland, it is made using the almost identical process that is used in Peoria or Dallas. The bun is toasted for the same amount of time, the sauce has the same amount of mayonnaise, relish and ketchup, and the lettuce is shredded using the same method. Consistent process equals consistent quality.

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We all wish that the same were true when our agents are talking with customers. We want them to offer a consistent level of service; so many companies implement expectations of specific scripting. But there is one huge problem! In this case, the customer has the ability to talk back, and not just be placed in a box to sit under a heating lamp. When the agent asks a question or delivers content and information, the customer has the ability to ask new questions or provide new perspective. So we have to teach the agent how to make decisions based on that information. As the call changes, the agent must also adapt to solve problems and create meaningful relationships with the customer.

Since the parameters of the call changes much like the parameters of a basketball game, we need a coach there to add different levels of coaching support.

Be sure to focus on specific, measurable results. While some areas of the coaching form will focus on objective data, other questions must include subjective data. "Did the agent request permission to put the caller on hold? That is an objective question — the answer is yes or no. An example of a subjective question is, "Did the agent build a good rapport with the caller?" My perspective of good may be different than yours (or the customer's) so I must answer the question with a more subjective answer — perhaps on a scale of 1 to 5. But, I also need to be able to coach agents on specific ways they can improve in this area. Just telling them to "be more friendly" is not enough. I need to be able to tell them specific words to use. But the coaching needs to also be subjective in nature and not objective. Please don't do what one contact center does when they require the agent to ask the caller, "So how is the weather there?" If I'm calling to complain about my service, the last thing I want to talk about is the weather!

2. CREATE METRICS THAT MEASURE WHAT IS IMPORTANT

In our book, *Ideas At Work*, co-author Scott Thomas and I define KPIs as Keeping People Inspired. While I love that definition, I know the real definition is Key Performance Indicators. So what are your key performance indicators? What do you measure in your center in the way of quality and coaching? I believe it is important that supervisors and managers have a clear goal for the number of coaching sessions that will occur each month. While there are many opportunities to coach — from walk-by coaching when something goes well or can be improved to teaching and coaching that occurs in a group — NOTHING should replace the expectation that the supervisor will coach each employee at least one time per month. And the middle and low-performers need even more attention. Create a strategy that outlines how much time should be allocated to each employee based on how he or she is performing.

I have seen recent best practices that recommend 20% for the best performers, 60% for the middle performers and 20% for the low performers. I think this is a good starting point for most supervisors.

Ensure that your metrics are tied to quality performance. Here are five questions to consider.

- Is the metric linked to specific company strategies or objectives?
- Does the metric tie to agent incentives?
- Does the metric vary among groups, call types and agent tenure?
- Is the metric easy to understand?
- Does the agent know exactly what they can do to move the dial?

Five Tips for Offering Encouragement

Encouragement is key to being an effective coach. Here are five tips for being a better encourager:

1. Be specific and tell people in detail exactly what you like about them or what you observed that they did well.
2. Be honest and kind without flattery. Point out the positives but don't be over-anxious, people know when you are being sincere.
3. Be spontaneous. Listen to what your heart says and be willing to say thank you for a job well done.
4. Be prepared for push-back. People are naturally a little uncomfortable with praise, but down-deep they LOVE it.
5. Be your own best encourager. Count your blessings. Don't let your life become all about work. Give back to the community, feed the homeless, build a house or visit a sick friend. Find an opportunity to encourage someone that is less fortunate than you — you might just hear someone return the favor and say to you, "great job!"

A Look at MBTI's Four Key Preferences

The MBTI Manual: A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (published by Consulting Psychologists Press) breaks down personalities into four key areas: Favorite World, Information, Decisions and Structure:

- **Favorite world:** Do you prefer to focus on the outer world or on your own inner world? This is called Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I).
- **Information:** Do you prefer to focus on the basic information you take in or do you prefer to interpret and add meaning? This is called Sensing (S) or Intuition (N).
- **Decisions:** When making decisions, do you prefer to first look at logic and consistency or first look at the people and special circumstances? This is called Thinking (T) or Feeling (F).
- **Structure:** In dealing with the outside world, do you prefer to get things decided or do you prefer to stay open to new information and options? This is called Judging (J) or Perceiving (P).

3. PERSONALIZE THE COACHING APPROACH

Through the years I have often heard trainers tell new managers that it is important that they manage all people the same. I am not one of those trainers. I think it's important that you manage everyone *completely differently*. Of course, fairness is always important, but managing people based on their needs, values and personalities is the best way to see people succeed.

Phil Jackson does not coach everyone the same. He understands that people respond to coaching differently — often based on their personalities and perspectives in life. In our training sessions, we like to show managers how they can coach based the specific personality of the agent. There are many personality tests available, but the basis for most comes from

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work published in 1962 by Katharine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment is a psychometric questionnaire designed to measure psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions (source: Wikipedia). In the research there are 16 different key personality traits and each one has both positive and negative attributes. In our training, we show how each person can have both positive and negative reactions to coaching — based on their personality.

Each person has a preference for how they learn and receive information and coaching (see the sidebar). For instance, once I understood that I am an EIFJ — Extraverted, Intuitive, Feeling and Judging person, I can better adapt my style of coaching to fit the style of the agent receiving coaching instead of just relying on my personality as the basis for the conversation. I highly recommend that you spend some time learning more about these concepts — it will make you a better coach and leader. You can learn more about the topic by reading *Please Understand Me*, by David Keirse. The book is an easy-to-understand guide into personalities. It shows the negatives and positives for each type and also offers an easy to complete personal test to help you understand your personality.

4. TRAIN YOUR COACHES TO COACH

Recent industry research shows that less than 64% of new managers receive any formal training before assuming the role. How can we expect them to be successful if we don't give them to tools to succeed? There are many books and training programs available to help you create successful training for new coaches. If you have seen me speak you have probably heard me talk about a simple coaching concept that I developed with Scott Thomas. We teach an approach called CalibrationCoaching® or YMCA, which stands for Your Thoughts, My Thoughts, Calibration and Action. It consists of:

Your Thoughts. Open the coaching session by asking questions instead of delivering expectations. Allow the agent to share his thoughts with you. Ask him to share with you his successes and his struggles on a daily basis. If there is a specific need for change, ask him about the specifics surrounding



the problem. The information he shares may surprise you or give you a new way to look at the problem as you both seek improvement.

My Thoughts. This is the opportunity to talk about the behavior from your perspective as the agent's manager. Explain what needs to change and why. Be specific and talk about behaviors, not attitude.

Calibration. This is the most important part of the conversation. This is the time to calibrate the agent's buy-in for change. You want him to explain how he will improve. You want the agent to leave the conversation with a plan.

Action. In the days after the coaching session, inspect what you expect — follow up to confirm that the agent is meeting the new expectation. If he begins to slip back into the previous behavior, start the process over and walk him through the plan again. It works!

Your Most Important Role as a Leader

Phil Jackson didn't win 10 NBA championships without some incredible talent on his team. If you don't hire the right players, the quality offered in your call center will never reach the expectations of the customer. But, once you have a talented team in place, you must do what Phil does and coach people to improve on their weaknesses and master their strengths.

Coaching is the most important role of a leader. If you don't believe me, just ask Kobe and Michael how they won those championships. They'll tell you their coach had a lot to do with their success! 📌

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