

# Expanding Your Employee Development Capacity

By David A. O'Brien, WorkChoice Solutions



One of my favorite Dilbert cartoons features the fictional character Alice who is instructed by her “pointy haired” boss to write a performance review of herself for him to sign. Alice asks, “What will our seven layers of management be doing while I manage myself?” Responding to the angry look on her boss’s face, she adds “Sorry, I’ll ding myself for that on my evaluation”. Her boss then replies, “If you can’t find me, have Carol my secretary sign my name on your performance review”.

While there is certainly some humor to be found in this and other Dilbert cartoons, there is nothing funny about skirting one of leadership’s most critical responsibilities, namely; employee development discussions. All too often these discussions get relegated to the dreaded once-a-year routine where little benefit actually occurs. I remember a recent coaching case where early in the project assessment phase, the HR Vice President told me that “Bob’s issue had been going on for nearly two years”. When I asked about Bob’s perception of “the issue” I was told that he didn’t have a clue because no one had ever told him about “the issue”. This may come as a surprise to you, but I have seen this scenario play out more times than I care to remember. The real shocker in many of these cases is that not only does the person not get to hear about “the issue”; they go on getting average or above average performance ratings and even bonuses despite the fact that their behavior or lack of results are creating “an issue”.

One of the reasons the above scenario plays out with some degree of frequency is that many leaders view employee coaching and development as a complex and time consuming process. It’s not, or at least it doesn’t have to be. Building the case for employee coaching and development begins with acknowledging that this is a critical part of good leadership. It also helps to understand that good leadership is among other things, about creating more leaders not more followers. Another reality today is that many world-class organizations have clearly defined performance metrics for leaders which are linked to employee development. Regardless of the motivation, it makes good business sense for leaders to develop meaningful strategies for expanding their coaching capacity.

Often, leaders get distracted by the misconception that they need to be therapists or counselors to be effective with employee coaching and development. This is not the case. What does help however is an open and honest approach which is genuinely supportive of the employee’s success. It also helps to recognize that all employees have development needs, not just the poor performers.

There are many scenarios in which a coaching discussion is relevant. Some potential examples include, Personal Enrichment, Professional Development, Performance Improvement and

Career Advancement. In the Personal Enrichment scenario the employee may want to expand his or her knowledge of an area that will help them in their role in an indirect way. It may involve learning a new language or even taking a course related to a hobby. In both the Professional Development and Performance Improvement scenarios, it is most likely related to helping them to expand their impact in their current job. The Career Advancement scenario often is linked to their long term career goals beyond their current role. Regardless of the scenario, it is important to follow a process that moves the employee in the right direction. It is also important to remember that all of the above scenarios encompass learning.

The following is a five stage process that I have used with many leaders to expand their capacity to coach and develop their employees.

**Stage #1:** Identify the issue – *what, why, how* and *when* are key questions to consider.

**Stage #2:** Establish agreement that the issue exists and has consequences if applicable.

**Stage #3:** Explore and define appropriate solutions, related actions and metrics.

**Stage #4:** Provide follow-up support and monitor progress.

**Stage #5:** Acknowledge progress and success.

While there are other coaching methodologies that you can follow, the above represents an effective process for helping to make sense of your *employee development* leadership responsibility. More importantly, it provides a workable framework for achieving a higher level of employee productivity and engagement.

## Five More Things You Can Do Now:

1. Initiate a discussion with your leadership peer group about their view and experiences related to employee coaching and look to expand your own coaching comfort level and capacity.

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2. Seek out your HR team for help with the coaching process and work to engage them as your partners in employee development.
3. Identify your bottom three performers and explore what can be done in a collaborative way to help improve their value and impact through a coaching intervention.
4. Identify one key employee who would benefit from a coaching and development discussion and who would allow you to build on your coaching capacity.
5. Invest 5 minutes to complete the free, **Coaching Effectiveness Survey** on the WorkChoice Solutions website. Key words, *Learning Resources, Leadership Assessments*.

## About David A. O’Brien

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness consulting services that was founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, nonprofit and municipal clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. He is also an in-demand keynote speaker on the topic of leadership excellence. His first book, *The Navigator’s Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available online and in bookstores nationwide. Additionally, his many articles have appeared in a variety of local, regional and national publications. To learn more, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at [www.workchoicesolutions.com](http://www.workchoicesolutions.com) or contact him directly at 860.242.1070.

