

The Importance of Observations & Coaching

The ancient Chinese proverb “a picture is worth a thousand words” is once again being validated in today’s fast paced world. With businesses and their associates being pushed to be more productive, management is continually seeking ways to do more with less. One way to accomplish this is by taking a “snapshot” of associates, analyzing what is going on, and then make improvements. This simple but important procedure of watching someone do their job is considered an “observation.”

Most people would say this sounds very basic and understated. All you do is watch someone. But there is a real art and value to this process. How many of us really “listen” when someone talks to us? Can we remember to just keep quiet and take in everything that is being said? Watching someone do their job is just like listening to them. It is the process of standing back and really seeing what is going on.

Many diverse industries from education and medicine to manufacturing and distribution are successfully using the observation process, in conjunction with a Performance Coaching Program, to improve their productivity. These powerful tools allow supervisors to learn from the best of their associates and share that data with their lower performers. Also, it provides an immediate two-way flow of information on safety issues, productivity suggestions, and work concerns, which fosters improved management-associate relations.

The observation process is an integral part of a Performance Coaching Program, which is defined as a *formal and consistent way to provide focused, one-on-one feedback and hands-on training for associates*. Most successful programs utilize a written report to accurately record all pertinent data. They also include regularly scheduled observation and coaching sessions for each associate. All associates, both high and low performers, are observed and coached, with the distinction that low performers are observed more often than high performers. Argent recommends that observations and coaching sessions be conducted one-on-one, and that each observation be conducted for 30 to 60 minutes. Immediately following the observation, a coaching session should be held to review the positive aspects of the associate’s performance, the opportunities for improvement that were identified and the steps that can be taken to address those opportunities.

For most people, watching someone is an uncomfortable process. Hourly associates can easily get the impression you are “spying” on them to fire them. Nothing is further from the truth. After just a few well conducted observation and coaching sessions, associates begin to realize that the observer/coach is there to watch, listen and help. In fact, the goal of a Performance Coaching Program is two-fold:

- *First, to improve productivity, quality, and safety on an individual level.*
- *Second, to identify area-wide opportunities that impact entire operational groups.*

The implementation of a Performance Coaching Program will result in an immediate and measurable increase in productivity. This is accomplished by coaching the lower performers to utilize better work methods and improve their productivity and establishing a culture of continuous improvement. On a longer-term basis, significant productivity gains will come from developing, implementing and teaching the Best Practices learned from detailed observations. The ability to effectively communicate with your associates is the key to reacting to changes in today’s fast-paced business world. Showing an associate a “snapshot” of their performance through an observation and coaching session is a powerful communication tool.

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