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[Home](#)
[Mission](#)
[Services](#)
[Testimonials](#)
[Clients](#)
[About](#)


# Focus

*A Newsletter published for clients and friends of Wagner Consulting Group*

## Increasing Productivity by Coaching

Coaching employees is a terrific leadership lever from both a near-term and long-range perspective. It boosts productivity and delivers high-impact results immediately while building capacity for sustainable growth. A leader can coach one person or a group, at a scheduled time or at a teachable moment, in almost any setting, at no cost beyond time. Good leaders spend at least 10% of their time at work coaching or mentoring employees, and thereby help build more productive, agile, and profitable companies.

Coaching is different than managing or teaching or being a cheerleader, although leaders also carry out those roles. Coaching is the act of providing feedback, insight, and guidance to one or more people. In the coaching role, a leader demonstrates genuine concern for the individual, and offers advice to help the person achieve his or her full potential. In contrast to management, which is about measurement and control, coaching is founded in concern for the person and their potential for growth. A good coach lifts up the person and helps him or her aspire to lofty goals.

Coaching adds value to a company in five important ways that, collectively, improve productivity, reduce unwanted employee turnover, and create a working environment the best people want to join. These value-adders range from energy to encouragement, and share the common goal of developing more capable employees.

- **Energy and excitement.** First, a good coach creates energy and excitement by painting a picture of possibilities and defining one or more goals that promise a bright future. The goal may be personal (earn a certification, degree, financial reward, promotion, etc.) or directly related to

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the organization, like reaching a revenue milestone or opening a new office location.

- **Teamwork.** Significant achievement usually requires collective efforts, and a good coach forges teams of enthusiastic people. Team spirit ignites creativity and builds momentum. People are excited to be part of something greater than themselves.
- **Overcome barriers.** People working directly on a problem may lack the knowledge or perspective to be aware of alternate solutions. The view from the press box (metaphorically speaking) allows the coach to suggest solutions and otherwise remove barriers to success. The coach can also use influence and formal authority to break down organizational barriers or obtain resources necessary for individual or team success.
- **Sounding board.** The fourth way a coach adds value is to serve as a sounding board to help people think through issues. Attentive listening coupled with appropriate questions (“Why do you think . . .” or “What happened next?” or “How might we do that differently?”) helps a person clarify thoughts and reach an “Aha!” moment.
- **Encouragement.** Of all the ways a coach adds value, none has more potential for lasting impact than offering encouragement to a person. As a source of encouragement, a coach boosts confidence (and the probability of a success) by saying, in effect, “I believe in you.” This encouragement is so powerful that many people recall with deep emotion a time long years past when someone they respected said, “I believe in you. You can do this.” Affirmation like this has set countless people on a path of great success, and their achievements have enriched the lives of countless others. *If you can do nothing else, do this.*

Finally, don't dismiss coaching as an optional, feel-good activity; it is a competitive necessity that directly affects company profits. A good coach improves results today and helps build an organization capable of sustainable

growth. A workplace culture that supports coaching demonstrates respect for people, and affirms their intrinsic worth as individuals in addition to their contribution as employees. Good people are more likely to stay in this working environment, and great people may be attracted to the company because they want more than just a paycheck.

How would you rate yourself as a coach, using the five areas described previously? More importantly, how would those you lead rate you?

*Tom Wagner*



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