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## Managers must have more coaching conversations

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Managers who provide solutions to employees' problems instead of coaching them to come up with their own, lose an important opportunity to improve their company's long-term productivity, says coach Anthony Sork.

Sork, the managing director of [Sork HC](#), says that managers need to become comfortable with the concept of "coaching conversations" - which differ from structured coaching sessions - in order to truly develop capability and performance in their teams.

Many managers, he says, like to "move at pace, solve problems and get on with business", and prefer to schedule structured review and development cycles with employees.

But these managers often "miss the opportunity to develop their 'coaching' behavioural style to its full potential", he says. "Their people tend to approach them with problems and the manager typically solves it for them in the interest of efficiency. The view from the manager's perspective is: 'I have the solution so here it is', which seems sensible at the time."

Managers expect that when they provide the solution, the employee will learn from the experience, Sork says, but "unfortunately the opposite usually occurs. The employee becomes reliant on the manager's expertise and experience, takes the solution and implements it, but usually does not understand the process the manager used to arrive at the solution, nor why it is the best for the problem".

Inevitably when the problem arises again, either the employee has not learned and re-approaches the manager, or they run with the same solution even though the circumstances may be slightly different and require a different approach, he says. "The learning opportunity has been lost and both efficiency and effectiveness have been compromised over the long term."

### Coaching conversations worth the effort

Developing the skill of having coaching conversations "on the run" might seem like an unnecessary investment of time to a manager, "because it does take a little longer in the moment than just providing the solution", Sork says. "However, the return on this time investment is significant over the long term for both the manager and the employee. Not only will the employee have a commitment to the solution because they have arrived at it themselves, they have usually learned the process of determining the solution and may well have come up with a better solution than the manager would have provided."

A coaching conversation can follow the same basic model as a formal coaching session, Sork says, and he recommends the well-known GROW(R) model which follows the conversation pattern of:

- **Goal**
- **Reality**
- **Options**

- **Will**
- **(Review)**

For example, he says, the conversation might follow this basic thread:

**Employee:** Jane I have this problem and I would like you to tell me what I should do to resolve it...

**Manager: (GOAL questions)** Well John, what do you believe is the preferred outcome that can be achieved in this situation?

**Employee:** I don't know - I was hoping you could tell me.

**Manager:** I have an idea but it may not be the best outcome so I am interested in your view.

**Employee:** OK - well I guess we could achieve XYZ.

**Manager:** OK - sounds good **(REALITY questions)** So if that is our preferred outcome, what is our current position? What is going on right now and what has led to this?

**Employee:** (Run down of the current situation)

**Manager: (OPTIONS questions)** so based on where we are starting from now and where we want to end up, what are the different options we have as our next steps?

**Employee:** Well we could either do A, B or C but I am not sure which is best.

**Manager:** From my experience C will lead to some further difficulty because of... However A and B sound like reasonable alternatives. **(WILL questions)** So of those two options which do you think would be the best alternative in this situation? Which one will you now go away and implement?

**Employee:** So you are happy for me to implement option A?

**Manager:** I fully support you if you would like to implement option A, but I want it to be your decision. Based on what we have discussed, do you still believe this is the best alternative to achieve the preferred outcome?

**Employee:** Yes I think that this will get the result we are after.

**Manager: (set up REVIEW)** Great John, so once you have implemented that solution, why don't we get back together to see how it went and what you were able to learn from it?

**Employee:** OK - great. Thanks for your help Jane.

Sork says this conversation model might feel "a little clunky to start with, but after only a few conversations it starts to flow naturally".

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