



# Leadership Transition Coaching

Who's coaching your rookie managers?

**Many new managers** get promoted without formal training or preparation. It is probably easy to think of someone who was promoted into their first management position and within 12 to 18 months either decided to quit, were asked to leave, or their staff wished they would leave. A recent study of front-line managers conducted by Development Dimensions International found that only 11 percent of managers were groomed to be leaders and 57 percent learned their leadership skills through trial and error.

While some valuable lessons can be learned through trial and error, relying on the ability of new managers to instinctively discover which tasks should command their time and energy is a poor business decision and a waste of precious resources. Providing leadership transition coaching to new mid-level managers is a development strategy that can have a profound impact on the organization, the managers and their staff.

## Stretch Assignment

In her article "Becoming the Boss," Linda Hill describes an individual's first management position as a 'stretch assignment.' Whether a first-time manager or a seasoned manager new to the organization, when someone takes on a new management position it will definitely feel like a stretch assignment. Regardless of his or her level of experience, training, or how many leadership books s/he has read, the candidate who is thrust into a new management role is bound to encounter situations that require new skills and approaches.

First-time managers face several challenges. They have to shift from being responsible for themselves and learn to delegate, address performance issues, and typically navigate the minefield of managing their former peers.



As front-line managers move up in the organization, they need to become more strategic and determine how to develop the future leaders of the department. Finally, managers from outside the organization who enter at a management-level position have to learn about, and adjust to, the culture of the organization to ensure they can accomplish their goals without being rejected by the organization. Each of these challenges, if not handled correctly, has the potential to derail a new manager.

## Coaching Can Help

Engaging a coach to address a particular challenge can be extremely valuable to a new manager. The coach can help new managers steer clear of potential potholes or at the very least help them learn from the mistakes they do make. Coaching can also be used in conjunction with training on topics like delegation and addressing performance issues to help managers determine how to apply these skills to their real life situations. Unfortunately, most organizations that are using coaching as a leadership development strategy focus on executive coaching or only high-potential staff. While it is undoubtedly beneficial to work with these individuals, failure to assist managers as they transition to their new role is a missed opportunity.

In a recent online article for *Training Magazine* titled "Leadership Coaching at the Front Line," Dr. Ria Hawkins, Sheree Butterfield and Jennifer Lee cite the impact that providing coaching for front-line managers

has had on one of their clients. With an investment of approximately 15 hours of coaching per manager, the client saw an increase in the managers' ability to provide constructive feedback, an increase in the employees' trust in the manager, and greater feelings of empowerment on the part of the manager. Overall, the managers that received coaching saw their engagement scores increase by 12 percent, while the scores of managers that did not work with a coach only increased by 1.7 percent.

We have run a similar program for the past two years at CareSource, a non-profit managed care health plan headquartered in Dayton, Ohio. Through our Leadership Transition Coaching program all new team leads, managers and directors receive a personal coach for at least the first six months. The coaching

for the coaching relationship.

Our Leadership Transition Coaching program has demonstrated positive results in a number of ways. Once the managers identify their expectations for the coaching process, they are asked to use a 10-point scale to rate their current confidence level in their ability to meet expectations before coaching begins and after the coaching relationship comes to an end. Currently we have experienced an average increase in confidence level of more than four-and-a-half points. Additionally, managers are contacted three months after coaching has concluded to see how they are continuing to benefit from coaching and determine what business impact the coaching has made.

One manager stated she was able to improve the efficiency of her one-on-one meetings with staff and to

feedback techniques. I am more confident in that area than before starting the coaching sessions." Another client stated, "The most important benefit was having someone who I knew I could trust. There were many challenges in navigating the new culture at CareSource while also dealing with some employee challenges. The coaching sessions made such a difference for me, and were without a doubt a key to my early successes in my new management role."

### A New Opportunity

Our experience at CareSource, as well as the example provided by Hawkins, Butterfield and Lee, prove that Leadership Transition Coaching provides a new opportunity for the coaching industry to make a difference in organizations. For internal coaches, or for individuals looking to start an internal

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complements a comprehensive training program to assist managers in implementing the new skills they are learning as well as addressing the other unique challenges that arise along the way.

In the beginning of the relationship the coach helps the manager identify what new skills, knowledge, and/or approaches are needed for success in the new role. Additionally, the manager will articulate the changes she would like to create within her team or department and what is needed to execute the plan. The manager will then identify up to five expectations or goals she has

delegate more effectively. She estimated this resulted in a savings of more than 150 hours annually. Two other managers stated that if it weren't for coaching, they would not have stayed in their role. Comparing the average cost of replacing these two individuals to the cost of their participation in the coaching program over the past two years, retaining these two managers resulted in a 340 percent return-on-investment.

We have also received numerous anecdotal comments that demonstrate the impact of coaching. One manager stated, "I feel these sessions have helped me to improve on my

coaching program, this is an area where you can demonstrate an impact and make a difference for the organization and the individual. It is time consuming and expensive to recruit and train a new manager. Unfortunately, many organizations are setting new managers up for failure and don't even realize it. If you are an external coach, this may be a new niche that you can market. As the economy improves, retention of management staff is going to be one of the most critical challenges organizations face, and the coaching industry can be poised to help address their needs. •