



FOR MANAGERS:

# 4 Steps To Delivering Effective Coaching & Feedback

*Advice From The CHRO—White Paper Series*

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*Guest Authored By Bryan L. Olson, CHCO Columbia Care*

## Introduction



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*I've been fortunate in my career to have: worked with many great leaders; participated in tremendously insightful executive training sessions; and benefited from the knowledge of strong mentors and sponsors. I've taken a little something from each of those experiences and sprinkled in some of my own learnings. The result is a four-step approach to coaching and feedback which has helped me to build several high-performing, fully-engaged teams in a number of different organizations and industries. This article provides a brief overview of that approach and includes tips for managers who want to become more effective coaches.*

*First, coaching and feedback can mean many different things, so let's briefly define them. Coaching is a method of leading, directing, instructing and training a person, with the aim of improving performance, achieving specific goals or developing specific skills. Feedback is the sharing of information in terms of the performance that is expected from and the performance that was exhibited by an employee. Both are important and managers should provide both coaching and feedback to each of their direct reports on a regular basis. Now, let's move on to the four steps.*







### Step 1: Make sure you have a sufficient relationship

You can only effectively coach someone with whom you have a sufficient relationship. Coaching can only effectively be given and received when the relationship between the parties is built on trust. Said another way, a person can only effectively hear the coaching if they believe that it is being given with their best interests and personal development in mind. That's what I mean by having a "sufficient" relationship - that when you deliver the coaching it is perceived by the recipient that you are doing it because you care about them and their development.

Personally, I invest significant time in building relationships at work. I've found that it helps me to be effective in many aspects of my job, but that it's particularly helpful when it comes to coaching. I rarely provide coaching in cases where a sufficient relationship hasn't yet been established. I will often go so far as to explain the concept and then ask the potential coaching recipient whether we are at a point in our relationship where coaching and feedback would be appreciated. I tell them that it's fine if we are not there yet and that I appreciate it when people are honest enough to acknowledge when we are not. Simply having these types of genuine conversations can help to deepen relationships.

→ **TIP:** *Invest in building relationships with the people you are coaching. If you don't, you will be limited in your effectiveness as a coach.*

### Step 2: Coach to weaknesses, which helps to avoid failure

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When many managers think about coaching, they often envision themselves telling an employee about what they need to do better. Making sure that employees know what's expected of them and making them aware when they are falling short of those expectations is indeed part of what good managers need to do. That helps team members to avoid failure.

It's important that this type of feedback be provided based on more than a single data point that has come to the manager's attention. If a manager provides feedback for improvement every time they learn of something that may need to be improved, they run the risk of coaching based on impressions that aren't founded on facts or reality.



It is important to coach to weaknesses whenever you have enough data to know that an employee is not meeting your performance expectations (such as when you have multiple examples of the employee falling short). You should be sharing this feedback in a timely manner. A weakness mentioned in an annual review should never be a surprise.

→ **TIP:** *Coach to weaknesses when: you have multiple data points; you have witnessed the behavior personally; or your boss told you to do so.*

So how do you best coach to weaknesses? Simply put, do it as soon as possible after the event or events which led to the need to coach, and use specific examples whenever possible. Be direct, but not unkind. Make sure that the employee understands the feedback, and work with them to figure out ways to improve.

## Step 3: Coach to strengths, which leads to success

While coaching to weakness helps to avoid failure, reinforcing and developing the areas where an employee is already strong leads to success and their increased engagement. Teams tend to be most effective when they are comprised of talented people working at what they do best. Identifying the strengths of your team members and then reinforcing and developing those strengths will lead to their success.

→ **TIP:** *Coach to strengths frequently. Do it whenever you witness something done particularly well.*

When you are coaching to strengths, be sure to be genuine. Only give a compliment if you truly mean it and make sure that your body language reinforces what your words are saying. In other words, don't discount the message by unintentionally using negative micro messages (such as not making eye contact, or typing an e-mail while you are giving positive feedback over the phone).

## Step 4: Develop yourself so that you can effectively develop others

You can only effectively develop others if you are first developing yourself. Everyone needs to find the best way to develop themselves. For me, one of the most important components of my personal and professional development is what I refer to as my quarterly introspection days.

Four times per year I take a day for myself where I work through my thoughts and decisions with respect to the things that are most important in my life (e.g. my relationships, career, hobbies, financial planning, etc.). I spend time exploring what's working well, where I can improve, and how I can better allocate my time. I find that this exercise helps keep me balanced and focused on the things that are most important in my life. It puts me in a better position to coach and develop others.

*A few ways you could develop yourself include:*

- Working with a career coach
- Obtaining 360 degree feedback
- Introspection
- Developing or maintaining your personal brand
- Creating your own personal development plan
- Finding or becoming a mentor
- Making sure to have balance in your life

## *The Important Role of “Managers of Managers”*

Managers of managers have an additional role to play. They are in the best position to create an environment of coaching and feedback. They should hold their managers accountable for developing each of their team members. One of the simplest ways to ensure this is happening is to schedule recurring check-in meetings with each of your managers where the agenda is entirely focused on discussion of each team members' development and progress.

I have also found it helpful to conduct skip level meetings. I meet one-on-one with each member of my organization. In advance of each meeting I request that the employee complete a form and send it to me. The form asks questions such as: “On a scale of 1 to 10, how busy are you? Using any scale you like, how fulfilled are you in your current job? What assignments, training or development opportunities will be your focus in the coming year? From a longer-term perspective, what do you see yourself doing in your career?” We don't go through every answer during the meeting, but asking employees to give thoughtful consideration to these questions and submit their answers in advance tends to lead to very productive developmental discussions. I hold about 100 of these sessions each year. It's a significant investment of time, but the returns on that investment are substantial. My team members are more engaged when they know that I am focused on their growth and development and I am in a better position to lead because I have a much more informed view of the challenges and opportunities of each of their roles.

*“I meet one-on-one with each member of my organization.”*





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## About the Author

*Bryan Olson is the Chief Human Capital Officer for Columbia Care, the country's first and largest medical marijuana cultivation and dispensary company. Prior to Columbia Care, Bryan was CHRO for global law firm K&L Gates, where he was responsible for the firm's overall human capital and talent strategy, as well as the delivery of human resources services to colleagues worldwide.*

*With over 25 years of professional experience, Bryan previously held HR senior executive positions at Aetna and United Technologies Corporation (UTC). In those roles he gained substantial experience in international HR operations, employee relations, human capital management, M&A, HR consulting, HR information systems, talent development, total rewards, organizational design, HR policy, employment law compliance and process improvement. Prior to joining UTC, he was an executive compensation and employee benefits attorney at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meager and Flom, and he also held several positions with Fidelity Investments.*