

Why Parental Coaching Techniques Matter in the Workplace

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Every parent understands the challenges and rewards of teaching children. But can similar skills be employed in the business and office environment to help attract and retain the best staff?

What are the secrets of successful companies? Why do staff so often stay with companies and in roles, despite a lack of perceived benefits or financial rewards? In most cases, the answer lies with the boss. Anecdotal and actual evidence so often suggests that job satisfaction and loyalty to a business is more likely to be governed by the quality of the relationship with your manager, than about the money that you earn. It is a factor that many successful global businesses now appreciate.

These firms understand that while it is critical to first recruit the best possible talent, retaining and developing these people requires more effort. My own experience suggests that the use of staff coaching techniques based largely on the parenting skills honed by humans over thousands of years are a key success factor in modern businesses.

What makes a good parent coach?

A good parent coach takes time. They address their child at eye level as they speak, listen and question actions and motivations. They talk to the child to help them to understand the reasons for a certain behaviour. They listen to help to ensure that the child understands and owns the route to improvement. They ask effective questions to ensure that the child will avoid repeating the same mistake in future.

Albeit with slightly different psychological language and maturity in a parent-child environment, these are precisely the coaching skills and actions used by successful leaders in businesses.

For example, careful use of the word “why” is important when addressing and teaching children as it has been shown to invoke a strong emotional response, prompting the brain to prepare for something bad that is about to happen. The result is that the body tenses in response, limiting our ability to behave in an open, creative way.

As parents, we typically understand this reaction, and so control the way we act with and speak to children. By choosing words carefully, the adult can create a more effective coaching environment that encourages open, innovative reactions from the child.

So instead of using “why”, parents tend to craft questions differently. For instance, instead of asking the child “why are you always making this mistake?”, they would rephrase the question as “how can daddy help you understand this better?”. In the business world, a frequent latecomer might be reformed by asking “how can I help you to be punctual?” rather than blasting them with “why are you always late?”.

Substituting words that can instil fear and apprehension, with words that are “fun” and “encouraging” is a key part of parent coaching, as is

the use of a positive attitude when highlighting the child's mistakes. Celebrating both successes and failures create a safe learning environment for the child.

Similarly, a good business leader or line manager knows how to use coaching business language to create a safe environment in the office for learning and creating value in a team.

The art of recognition and edification

Good parents communicate love and support for their children in different manners and gestures, as set out and discussed by author Gary Chapman in his book "The 5 love languages".

- through words of affirmation as parents tell their children that they love them;
- through gifting and buying the child presents;
- through quality time and being present for the child;
- through acts of services and doing something such as sending your child to school;
- through physical touch such as a hug, a pat or simply holding hands.

Although the business setting and relationships are clearly very different from that within the family unit, the five love languages are also present in effective teams. While used appropriately, respectfully and depending heavily on situation and gender, they can be interpreted by a team leader as:

- Words of Affirmation: "Hey bro, great job in winning the contract!"
- Gifting: "Hey guys, I've bought tea for everyone – keep up the good work!"
- Quality Time: "Hi John, can you spare 20 minutes for a brief chat?"
- Acts of Services: "Guys, I can help deliver the tender document once it's done."
- Physical Touch: a light pat on the shoulder to show encouragement.

The learning and working environment

Creating the right learning style and physical environment is crucial in helping a person to learn, as

factors that apply as much in the home and school for children, as it does in the workplace.

The old school mantra insists that the child sits still and study continuously for two hours without any disturbance, distraction or external motivation. I used to adopt this coaching style as a parent and noticed that my daughters became fidgety very quickly, undermining their ability to learn.

I soon realised that this was the wrong approach. Like me, they are both kinesthetic and visual learners, so I started to change the way they study. I made them stand up or sit for a few minutes with frequent breaks to ensure that there is no monotony in the lesson plans; placed M&M'S and chocolate candy in front of them as a motivating reward and glasses of water to keep them hydrated.

I also introduced props to demonstrate how scientific principles work as this played to their desire for visual learning, and needed to see something in action in order to comprehend and understand better.

Underpinning these new learning styles was a stimulating environment which creates a sense of fun for the child. An organic chaos of furniture, music and even colour of the room, also helps to promote curiosity and playfulness, and the right fragrance and plants can assist.

Similar techniques can be brought into play in the business environment, to create a working environment that enables staff to effectively communicate and enjoy performing at their optimum level for the maximum amount of time.

Body language

Lastly, the importance of understanding body language cannot be underestimated as a coach - when addressing and teaching children, and when attempting to get the best out of adult teams in an office environment.

For instance, when parents address a child, it is best to sit side by side and at the same level to get the message across. It is a similar situation when addressing a trainee or employee in the business environment, where finding the most effective location to communicate can reap great reward.

Parents also understand the impact that simple adjustments to tone of voice and body language can make when communicating with children. Adopting this approach in business can boost performance and

clarity when presenting projects or addressing issues within different business teams.

Conclusion

In the design, engineering and management sector, a firm's competitive advantage rests squarely with the quality, capability and managing understanding of their staff. Creating the culture and learning environment to maintain and advance these skills is critical to sustaining this advantage.

I strongly believe that the development of coaching skills for leaders will be the weapon that makes an organisation strong amidst crisis or successes. In the business environment, we have much to learn from the best parenting skills and techniques seen all around us every day.

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