

Be the guide on the side

5 ways to coach employee performance

By Monica Wofford

On more than one occasion, Dr. Jack was not pleased with Margie's decisions and made it quite clear.

Margie did the best she could in using her own judgment to make decisions and give other staff members in the front office direction, but she couldn't read Dr. Jack's mind. It was very frustrating to her and other staff members.

How are they supposed to learn without any guidance or instruction? Margie had always tried to be proactive and learn before doing something rather than only learning after her mistakes. But, in her situation, this had become almost impossible.

She was working with a doctor who, instead of being a guide on the side, was becoming quite skilled at being "Jack in the back."

Proactive learning comes through coaching. Yes, you can teach people through allowing them to make mistakes, but you also run the risk of damaging their self-esteem in the process.

Practice being the guide on the side in your office. Take the time to be a coach first and a disciplinarian second. Give them a fighting chance to do something well or close to right the first time by following these tips. They can help you help those you have the privilege of leading.

1. Train versus "Tell and yell." Trainers certified by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) receive instruction entitled "Tellin' Ain't Trainin'!" and it's true.

Telling someone what to do is not the same as training them how to do it.

The definition of training is the transfer of knowledge and skill. Thus, your first training begins with finding what they already know, and what knowledge and skill is missing.

The guide on the side spends time finding out what

they know and then fills in the gaps by telling them the instructions, showing them how to do something, and observing as they do it themselves.

Keep in mind that everyone learns at different speeds, and just as tellin' ain't trainin', directin' and yellin' ain't coachin'!

2. Handle with care. With any office staff you employ, you are entrusting someone you may not know very well with important and confidential records.

You may be tempted to micromanage this persons' every waking move and make sure they do every single thing right.

Much as you would handle those records with care, the same is true for the people you have trusted to work with them.

Take the time to be a coach first and a disciplinarian second.

Only micromanage those who are brand new or those who seem to be having trouble.

Once they've got it, do all you can to let them do it on their own. Too much micromanagement will teach them to always rely on you and never take initiative.

3. Avoid giving them their opinions. Don't give them their opinions, ask for them. You might be surprised at what they say.

After all, if they work every day with these issues, their opinions and ideas on how to improve on those issues might be more accurate than yours.

4. Give them wings. If you stifle the initiative and freedom of those you work with, then you are removing their ability to try new things, find new solutions, create smoother processes, and so forth.

More importantly, you might also kill their desire to keep trying and to be an integral part of your business. Do you want high-initiative employees that you occasionally have to rein in, or robots who only do as you say when you say it?

