Coaching behaviors motivate people, increase job satisfaction and morale, and strengthen bonds between individuals. Organizations are finding that creating a coaching culture, in which everyone thinks in terms of developing and improving the performance of others as an aspect of doing his or her own job, generates synergy.

More and more organizations today, of all sizes and both public and private, are seeking to train their leaders to coach others in the organization. In these organizations, coaching is viewed as a viable way to develop and influence individuals and to enhance performance. As the use of coaching behaviors spreads throughout an organization, a change begins to occur—the organization develops a coaching culture.

A coaching culture is an organizational setting in which coaching occurs not only on a formal but also an informal basis. A large proportion of individuals in the organization informally practice coaching behaviors as a means of relating to, supporting, and influencing one another. Coaching language is embedded and commonplace. Formal coaching engagements or relationships, whether with professional internal or external coaches, and training programs are only part of a larger system of relating through coaching behaviors.

Some organizations aspire to a coaching culture by establishing coaching relationships and conducting training programs, but in many of these organizations coaching behavior is used only intermittently. A true coaching culture includes structured coaching engagements and training programs but has advanced the process to the point where coaching behavior is ubiquitous.

Ideally, everyone whose organizational function involves influencing or supporting others would practice coaching behavior. In their book...
Everyone’s a Coach: You Can Inspire Anyone to Be a Winner (Zondervan, 1995), former pro football coach Don Shula and management consultant Ken Blanchard put it this way: “Everybody’s a coach in some aspect of life, and that means you. Regardless of whether you have an official title, there are people out there who need your help.”

This suggests that everyone has something to offer others and that such support in organizations builds a sense of community and improves performance. When everyone in an organization thinks that developing and improving the performance of others is an aspect of doing his or her own job, organizational synergy is generated.

**SOCIAL NORM**

From an organization leadership perspective, informal coaching behavior can be used to clarify and maintain focus and alignment, stimulate motivation, and sustain action orientation.

Formal coaching, whether by external or internal coaches, is generally believed to enhance the productivity of those coached and, to some extent, those influenced by the coachee. Typically, however, it is cost prohibitive for everybody in an organization to have a formal coaching relationship.

Creating a social norm whereby everyone acts like a coach some of the time, informally influencing through the use of coaching behavior, is a cost-effective way to enhance productivity without the expenses and systems associated with formal coaching. Once a coaching culture is established it becomes self-sustaining, and little or no extra resources are needed to focus action and improve results.

To effect coaching behaviors, people must practice a mental frame of reference consisting of commitment to development and action. Practicing this point of view disposes people to improve their own behavior.

Coaching behaviors motivate people and promote increased job satisfaction and good morale. And they establish a structure and process for strengthening the cooperative and collaborative bonds between individuals.

Coaching behavior can be thought of as what the coach does to influence the coachee that is characteristic of coaching as opposed to other methods of influencing, such as pressure, bartering, and ingratiation. Coaching behavior includes establishing a collaborative relationship; addressing issues of assessment, challenge, and support; and seeking results through asking questions, active listening, and using objective terms when describing behavior.

**FORMAL VS. INFORMAL**

It is important to differentiate between the way a professional coach performs coaching behaviors in the context of a formal coaching relationship and the way fellow organizational members informally use coaching behaviors.

In a formal coaching relationship the coachee and the coach enter into a written or verbal agreement or have an expressed contract that coaching will occur. They mutually and explicitly understand, endorse, and commit to the goals, actions, and timeline of the process and to their respective roles and responsibilities. The coach is expected to stay focused on the developmental issues and process and to actively direct his or her own energy, and that of the coachee, toward developmental and performance. Typically, the coach holds the coachee accountable for results, and someone else holds the coach accountable for the coachee’s results. The entire relationship between coachee and coach is about development and performance. Thus the coach uses coaching behaviors during virtually every moment of interaction with the coachee.

Informal use of coaching behavior occurs outside the context of a formal coaching relationship. Although people in organizations have a wide range of reasons for interacting with one another, coaching behaviors often will not be used. In any series of interactions between two people, different coaching behaviors may be used in isolation from each other, and some may not be used at all.

Typically, for example, informal coaching behavior does not include accountability.

Informal coaching occurs when people are alert to recognizing coachable moments in others. Fully leveraging these opportunities leads to the greatest expression of a coaching culture. These opportunities occur, for example, when a developmental or performance issue is topical and the coachee likely is receptive to coaching behavior. Coachable moments can occur in an almost limitless variety of circumstances, such as during a performance review, during planning and operational meetings for a business unit, and during casual meetings in the hallway or lounge, in an elevator, or on the golf course.

When leaders relate to those who report to them directly or indirectly, informal coaching can occur in a structured or casual sense. The structured use of coaching behaviors will look more like formal coaching than informal coaching, in that the leader likely will employ all the coaching behaviors and be fairly systematic about it. In particular the leader will hold the report accountable for per-
forming action steps and for the impacts of those steps. However, the entire relationship between supervisor and report is not restricted to development and performance. Thus, the supervisor will not be using coaching behaviors during virtually every moment of interaction and there likely will be no coaching contract.

In nonreporting relationships, which can include those with peers, team members, colleagues, co-workers, and friends, coaching behaviors leave the coachee plenty of room to be nonreceptive. Coaching behaviors take a conversational form. The coach has no responsibility to get through to the coachee. The coach is responsible only for maintaining and articulating his or her own developmental, action-oriented frame of reference, not for what the coachee does in response to these coaching behaviors.

Informal use of some coaching behaviors works well when attempting to influence up. To do this, one cultivates collaborative moments in which assessment data can be discussed, challenges can be identified, and supportive resources can be mobilized. Coaching behaviors that work well include asking questions that link the organization’s stated values and vision with actual events and inquiring about apparent inconsistencies and plans for the future. Help me understand inquiries are least likely to provoke negative reactions.

Initiating a coaching contract is likely inappropriate in such situations, though it is workable when the superior desires it. The same can be said of accountability; without buy-in from the superior it could backfire for the well-intended coach.

**GIVING SUPPORT**

The broad role of the organization is to create a culture that trains, models, supports, and rewards coaching behaviors in every functional area possible. Organizational support of coaching initiatives consists of a wide range of responsibilities, including removing roadblocks, implementing systems that facilitate the process, influencing organizational culture, ensuring that developmental learning is in alignment with organizational priorities, and rewarding the use of coaching behavior through performance appraisals and salary increases and bonuses. References to the desirability and use of coaching behaviors should be included in statements of organizational values and in performance and developmental planning for individuals.

Senior leaders, in addition to their contribution to the organization’s role in creating a coaching culture, have a key function in advocating, reinforcing, and modeling coaching behaviors. They can ensure that wherever feasible, references to coaching behavior appear in the organization’s statements of vision, mission, goals, planning, and values. They can acknowledge expressions of coaching behavior by less senior managers. And they can employ coaching behavior themselves to influence others.

An organization’s human resource, education, and training specialists can also advocate, reinforce, and model coaching. They can design training and support processes to help individuals become comfortable with and accustomed to the use of coaching behaviors.

An organization’s human resource, education, and training specialists can also advocate, reinforce, and model coaching. They can design training and support processes to help individuals become comfortable with and accustomed to the use of coaching behaviors.

Creating a positive attitude about coaching throughout the organization is necessary if a coaching culture is to flourish. Favorable beliefs and expectations about the use of coaching behavior are essential to influence the direction of the culture. In the presence of a suitable cultural attitude about coaching, coaching behavior will flourish, even without extensive use of formal coaching engagements.

A positive cultural attitude about coaching is not as critical for the success of formal coaching as it is for the development of a coaching culture. Although it is desirable for formal coaching engagements to occur within a social context that maintains positive attitudes and beliefs about coaching, it is not essential. Formal coaching can produce good outcomes even in a context of negative attitudes and beliefs about coaching. A high-potential formal coachee can do very well regardless of the beliefs others might hold about why he or she is receiving coaching and without exposure to coaching behavior from anyone other than his or her coach.

**SEVEN TIPS**

What can organizations do to cultivate a coaching culture? Here are some specific strategies and tactics:

- Ensure and promote alignment of organizational strategy (including values, vision, mission, and goals) and the behavior of senior leaders (words and actions) with the use of coaching behavior.
- Establish planned, formal, structured, and long-term programs for promoting coaching behavior, rather than sporadic, reactive, informal, or ad hoc events.
- Seek to create a cascade effect by developing internal coaching capacity through training programs and follow-on coaching tactics that focus on learning, applying, modeling,
Imbuing Your Organization with Coaching Behavior

and encouraging coaching behavior, both formally and informally.
- Ensure that the organizational concepts of leader and manager are synonymous with practicing and modeling coaching behaviors. This effect is enhanced when human resource, education, and training personnel are included in strategic planning as well as in the planning and execution of training initiatives.
- Incorporate coaching behavior as a job performance competency, and link it to systems for advancement, rewards, and incentives.
- Use external coaches as a positive developmental tool, not solely as a fix-it intervention for potential derailers.

Creating a coaching culture depends on promotion, throughout the organization, of positive thinking, feeling, and talking about coaching in general and coaching behavior in particular. Coaching behavior must be characterized as a friendly and efficient way for individuals to support one another in getting the job done and building better relationships in the process. Coaching cultures thrive on attitudes and beliefs that coaching behaviors are a highly valued way of relating, through which people indicate support and positive regard for each other.

A Kinder, Gentler, and Better Way to Downsize

Continued from page 11

inside or outside the organization. When the alternatives are identified, the employees and the organization are better equipped to manage transitions.

Another transition challenge is the employee who is eligible for early or regular retirement. Even at normal retirement age, many people are ready for a change but not for full retirement. How do these employees fit into this career coaching and transition process? The same way as any other employee looking for his or her next job.

The time is now for organizational leaders to set a vision that contains a career management process enabling all employees to be successful. Leaders are seeing how important career-oriented questions are to developing a clear vision and a more adaptable organization: What core and job competencies are required? What applications of those competencies benchmark employees as A players now and in the future? Can the organization win without A players in pivotal jobs?

By engaging specially trained career coaches to work with management and employees from planning all the way through transition, a downsizing organization can experience improved morale and a speedier recovery time, resulting in higher productivity and decreased costs. And the people who leave the organization can be helped to continue, and perhaps even advance, their productive working lives.

Nick Yacabucci is managing director and cofounder of Navigate Inc., a Raleigh, North Carolina–based firm specializing in providing coaches for career management and transitions (www.careernavigate.com). He is also associated, as an adviser, contributor, or educator with CCL, Business Leader magazine, the nonprofit association WorkdayAtWork, the Society for Human Resource Management, and the Babcock Graduate School of Management at Wake Forest University. Yacabucci holds an M.S. degree from Columbia University. He can be reached at nya@earthlink.net.

Leading Yourself Through Change

Continued from page 19

same approaches to other changes she wanted to make.

The task of changing organizations should not be taken lightly. People are too savvy to be manipulated with change-of-the-month initiatives or pep rallies exhorting them to change. In the final analysis, leaders need to consider how they themselves must change to get the results they seek. If they don’t, there’s no reason for them to expect their followers to embrace change any differently than they do now.

Robert A. Goldberg is an adjunct with and a former program manager at CCL. He is a principal of Organization Insight, a North Carolina–based consulting firm specializing in change management and executive team development. Goldberg holds an M.B.A. degree from City University of New York, Baruch College. He can be reached at rgoldberg@orginsight.com.