

How to Run and Document a Developmental Coaching Session

Coaching is a process of guiding an employee from one level of competency to another to improve self-confidence, grow in their ability to communicate effectively, work constructively with others, meet commitments and KPIs, take responsibility for their actions, and set goals and take action to achieve them.¹

Developmental coaching, based on the Developmental Coaching Model (DCM), is a type of shared counseling where employers work together with employees to identify strengths and weaknesses, identify the root cause(s) of performance-related problems, determine and create an appropriate action plan to resolve the problems or support employee growth, and details how the plan's progress will be monitored/evaluated.

Basis

The DC incorporates adult development learning theory, including the crucible idea that people accept their own ideas much faster than they'll accept those of others. For sustainable change, people must be in the center of their own learning, because they ultimately reject being told what to do.³

It's essentially a form of collaboration either between the employer and the employee, or that includes the help of a third-party. It aims to help a person to get past certain challenges through collaboration, problem-solving, and careful planning.

DC also sets up the expectation that managers are accountable for real time verbal feedback to employees with respect to job performance, and should not wait to do so until the annual performance review.

To succeed, certain key factors contribute to the success of the method. First of all, the communication between the employee and the counselor should be constructive, focused, and respectful. Second, both dialogue participants should accept their part in the improvement process. Both the employer and the employee have to be ready to listen, accept their mistakes, and be ready to take the necessary steps for improvement.

Developmental coaching is aimed at reducing inhibitors of career and workplace progression and helping people perform at a higher level. It succeeds when the root cause of performance problems are uncovered and addressed, an essential for achieving a sustainable performance change called for in an action plan.

Ultimately, DC is meant to engage the employee on a personal level, to understand what drives them, and what can be done to create the best conditions for their personal and professional improvement.

Uses

Developmental coaching is an appropriate methodology for facilitating difficult discussions around performance problems. But that's not its only use. It may be used because an employee is doing well and wants to cross-train in another job function or develop skills for promotion. The form also could be used to line up resources to support growth and improvement.

Steps

1. **Identification of need** includes issues arising from the need to conduct developmental counseling. What was observed in employee performance and how was it measured and documented?
2. **Preparation for coaching** includes activities such as selecting the location, scheduling the sessions, creating a non-threatening environment, and seeking to build trust.
3. **Conduct the coaching** includes your propositions and employee feedback on the issue under discussion. Documentation of the discussion is critical.
4. **Develop an action plan** or agreement of how employee will change their performance, what you will specifically do to support that change (e.g. regular feedback), and how and when the performance will be measured. Documentation of the action plan is critical.
5. **Implement and evaluate the plan and performance:** where the leader and employee are both “working the idea” or contract, and feedback is given. Documentation of results is important.

Documentation

Thorough documentation of the coaching process is critical, and full visibility is essential; it is the foundation of trust and credibility.

It is said that a non-documented coaching session or agreement “never happened”. What is worse is a *partly* documented meeting – you met, you talked, developed a general agreement – but never documented exactly what that was, or how that performance agreement would be monitored and the timing of that, or what feedback you agreed to provide.

At the least, this is unfair to both you as leader and the employee who was coached, with repercussions for human resources to unsnarl. Developmental coaching only succeeds when based on mutual trust and respect, where both you and the employee show you are credible with good intentions. If you or the employee don’t follow what was agreed in your coaching “contract”, that trust (and performance improvement) can be irrevocably lost.

The Developmental Coaching Form

That’s where the DC Form comes in. The Form:

- Leads you through the steps of the process from start to finish.
- Prompts you to prepare and document details at the beginning, middle, and end of a coaching cycle.
- Serves as an expandable document (as you type) that can be saved.
- Serves as a detailed record for both you and the employee, and perhaps HR.
- Serves as a record that you were doing your job professionally and motivates the employee to meet and even exceed the agreed performance. You extend your trust and the employee in turn, trusts and respects you.

The DC Form can be downloaded as a fillable PDF, which can be typed into and saved. Both you and the employee you coach should get copies.

See the example Form below for ideas on how to document a Coaching

Developmental Coaching (aka Performance Counseling / Session Documentation and Outcome)	
<p>Purpose: <i>A structured process to plan and hold a coaching/counseling conversation, what was agreed upon, what feedback was given, and when, in what format, and what assessment of the discussed performance will be in the future. This can be used for a performance review or an employee desire to learn new skills. The goal is to provide feedback and support the employee's growth & the rewards model.</i></p> <p>Uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the facts and observations that a leader will specifically discuss in an upcoming counseling session. • Direct and document a leader-employee discussion of how well KPIs are being met or a review of work behavior (can be exceeding expectations as well as needing improvement) • Establish the record of performance accountability (leader and person coached), the terms of an agreement that is reached, current and future work expectations and performance level, methods and frequency of feedback, and the type of future assessment evaluating the meetings expectations/goals. E.g. What did the leader specifically review and ask? What did the employee and leader agree to? • Provide a way for an employee's remarks to be documented during and as a result of the session. 	
Part I – Details	
Name of Employee (Last, First) Garnet Ghilorflop	Date of Coaching Session 4/22/23
Department Customer Service	Name and Title of Leader/Coach Xantho Phil Carotenoid
Part II -Background information	
<p>Purpose of Counseling: <i>(Leader states reason for coaching/counseling, e.g. performance/professional or event-oriented counseling, and includes leader facts and observations prior to the counseling.)</i></p> <p>On 3 occasions in the past 2 weeks (4/24,4/28. 5/2/22), Garnet has had to stay late and work their lunch hour entering notes and comments into the sales database. Garnet takes notes on paper during calls in order to remember what was discussed. [These observations were made by Garnet's supervisor]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expectation is that our customer service reps record customer details directly into our database with the customer still on the phone. • The expectation is that CSRs finish any work in the database during the 30' allotted in late morning and at shift-end, when CSRs are no longer in the phone answering queue. <p>Thus, Garnet is staying overtime to finish what they should be able to do in real time on customer calls, in order that they don't have to keep notes and are less likely to make mistakes. Further, Garnet has to call the customer again to verify their answers because those questions weren't asked while the customer was initially on the phone.</p> <p>In reviewing Garnet's record, they have not had trouble doing this in the last year, and in fact has had exemplary performance (as described by Garnet's supervisor). It's not clear what's the cause of current behavior.</p> <p>This coaching session will explore the underlying cause of Garnet's trouble entering customer information in real time. I'd like to support Garnet in getting back to their otherwise great performance putting information into the database.</p>	

This is an example of a completed DC Session Form showing how a developmental coaching session might be set up, conducted, documented, and how performance was evaluated after the session.

It's important to quantitate and document the performance issue (if relevant) and what work expectations are in force during the time the performance was measured.

Part III – Summary of Counseling

Complete this section during or immediately subsequent to the counseling session.

You'll want to show that you spoke about the facts but also asked if the employee agrees with them as stated. It's important to document the employee's side of the story and to identify, if possible, the root cause of the behavior.

Key Points of Discussion:

Garnet agreed that they were unable to enter all the customer information in real time on some calls in the last two weeks. They took detailed notes during the calls so that they could complete the database entries while off the phone.

All three calls where Garnet didn't complete all the required entries were with the same customer. Garnet reports that this customer was rude and made disparaging remarks about the questions we always ask of new customers. In the two follow-up conversations, Garnet captured the customer information they felt too upset to ask on the initial call.

Garnet notes that they always stick to the official New Customer Script with regards to asking questions.

Garnet was upset and felt pressured to move more quickly in the database than usual, in order to satisfy the customer. I asked whether Garnet could have brought in a supervisor to handle the customer, but Garnet felt they should have been able to handle it on their own.

We do not expect our service reps to complete conversations where the customer is openly hostile. Our supervisors are trained to handle this, which sometimes results in us refusing to accept the caller as a new customer.

I assured Garnet that escalating a hostile caller, especially one who makes personal remarks about the service, to a supervisor is the proper behavior.

Be as specific as you can about all parts of the Action Plan; what you've agreed to do along with what the employee has agreed to.

Plan of Action (Outlines actions that the employee will do after the counseling session to reach the goal(s). The actions must be specific enough to modify or maintain the employee's behavior and include a specified timeline for implementation and assessment (Part IV below).

- Garnet has agreed to escalate hostile calls in the future to a supervisor. Anytime a caller makes personal remarks about Garnet, Garnet will escalate the call. This includes any future interactions with the hostile customer we've flagged from conversations over the last two weeks.
- If the caller's demeanor feels "borderline hostile", Garnet will escalate the call and will discuss with a supervisor whether Garnet could have been able to complete entering customer information. We'll monitor and discuss what we think Garnet should be able to handle in the future.
- Garnet agrees that real-time entry of customer information is the expectation, and normal problem with this performance.

Summarize the Plan but also include the key points of the actual conversation. Note whether the employee agrees with the evidence for their performance.

Session Closing: (The leader summarizes the key points of the session and checks if the employee agrees with the plan of action. The employee agrees/disagrees and provides remarks if appropriate.)

1. Garnet will escalate calls that feel actively hostile or are "borderline hostile" to their supervisor in the next 3 weeks.
2. Garnet accepts that our expectation is not to have to handle an actively hostile customer. Garnet also accepts that they should be able to handle 'difficult' customers and will ask for coaching on what calls should and should not have to be escalated.
3. I discussed with Garnet a time in the coming weeks when we will review Garnet's performance (see next section).

Person coached: I agree I disagree with the information above.

Remarks by the coached person: I appreciate the way this was handled and am relieved that I'm not expected to handle really challenging customers alone.

Signature of person coached: Garnet Ghilorflop Date: 5/5/23

Leader responsibilities: (Leader’s responsibilities in implementing the plan of action.)

I will check in with Garnet and their supervisor on Friday of this week 5/10/23 and Friday next week 5/17/23 to see whether any of the borderline hostile escalated calls could have been handled by a CSR, and we will reach an agreement about where that “border” lies.

I will check in with Garnet and their supervisor on 5/28 to see if this plan is succeeding; that is, whether Garnet is escalating hostile customer calls (if they’ve occurred since) and whether Garnet is now filling out customer information in real time. I will also ask Garnet for any feedback on how we can continue to support them.

Signature of leader : Xantho Phil Carotenoid Date: 5/28/23

What will you do, specifically, on what dates?

Part IV – Assessment of the Plan of Action

Assessment: (Did the plan of action achieve the desired results? This section is completed by both the leader and the individual counseled and provides useful information for follow-up counseling.)

I spoke with Garnet’s supervisor on 5/17/23 and learned there haven’t been any further issues with Garnet filling out customer information in real time, nor do they need to stay late to make up for missed information.

I met with Garnet briefly on 6/10/23 and verified that they feel supported and that they are relieved that they can (and should) escalate hostile customer calls to the supervisor. I expect Garnet’s excellent work performance to continue. I’ve encouraged Garnet to speak up if they feel their work is impacted by how they are treated by any customer.

Don’t skip this or skimp this! The surest way to lose employee trust (including those who are uninvolved) is to show you don’t evaluate the outcome (i.e. you don’t really care – you’ve just “checked the box”). If the employee has followed the Plan in good faith, be sure to say so. Every time a DC session and evaluation turns out well, the whole team wins and group trust is increased.

Leader: X.P. Carotenoid Person coached: Garnet Ghilorflop Date of Assessment: 6/30/23

References

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A blank coaching form follows this job aid, below.

Developmental Coaching (aka Performance Counseling / Developmental Counseling)	
Session Documentation and Outcome	
<p>Purpose: A structured process to plan and hold a coaching/counseling conversation and document what was said, what was agreed upon, what feedback was given, and when, in what form, and the outcome of an assessment of the discussed performance will be in the future. This can be prompted by exemplary/suboptimal performance or an employee desire to learn new skills. The goal is to provide results-focused feedback, review, & the rewards model.</p> <p>Uses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the facts and observations that a leader will specifically discuss in an upcoming counseling session. • Direct and document a leader-employee discussion of how well KPIs are being met or a review of work behavior (can be exceeding expectations as well as needing improvement) • Establish the record of performance accountability (leader and person coached), the terms of an agreement that is reached, current and future work expectations and performance level, methods and frequency of feedback, and the type of future assessment evaluating the meetings expectations/goals. E.g. What did the leader specifically review and ask? What did the employee and leader agree to? • Provide a way for an employee’s remarks to be documented during and as a result of the discussion. 	
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Name of Employee (Last, First)	Date of Coaching Session
Department	Name and Title of Leader/.Coach
Part II -Background information	
<p>Purpose of Counseling: <i>(Leader states reason for coaching/counseling, e.g. performance/professional or event-oriented counseling, and includes leader facts and observations prior to the counseling.)</i></p>	
Part III – Summary of Counseling	
<p>Complete this section during or immediately subsequent to counseling.</p>	
<p>Key Points of Discussion:</p>	

Plan of Action (Outlines actions that the employee will do after the counseling session to reach the agreed upon goal(s). The actions must be specific enough to modify or maintain the employee's behavior and include a specified timeline for implementation and assessment (Part IV below).

Session Closing: (The leader summarizes the key points of the session and checks if the employee understands the plan of action. The employee agrees/disagrees and provides remarks if appropriate.)

Person coached: I agree I disagree with the information above.

Remarks by the person who was coached:

Signature of person coached: _____ Date: _____

Leader responsibilities: (Leader's responsibilities in implementing the plan of action.)

Signature of leader : _____ Date: _____

Part IV – Assessment of the Plan of Action

Assessment: (Did the plan of action achieve the desired results? This section is completed by both the leader and the individual counseled and provides useful information for follow-up counseling.)

Leader: _____ Person coached: _____ Date of Assessment: _____