Coaching Skills Inventory

Kenneth R. Phillips

3rd Edition

Info Kit

What customers say...

"Coaching Skills Inventory was really great. It helped identify the kinds of excuses employees usually throw at their managers and how to effectively handle those situations."
-Lora Pace, FedEx

"Ken Phillips did a great job - very concise and realistic."
-Cindy Nicholson, Franklin Templeton
on webinar - Seven Steps to Effective Coaching Meetings

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Coaching Skills Inventory

3rd Edition, by Kenneth R. Phillips

Overview

The *Coaching Skills Inventory* offers a logical, 7-step formula for conducting coaching meetings based on mutual trust and respect. The inventory presents 18 typical coaching situations. Individuals choose the actions they would most likely take, generating an overall Coaching-Effectiveness Profile. Participants learn a proven meeting model to improve their performance.

What the Assessment Measures

The inventory presents 18 typical coaching situations. Individuals choose the actions they would most likely take, generating an overall Coaching-Effectiveness Profile. The steps and skills comprising the Model are all grounded in behavioral science research and have been found to distinguish managers who are effective at conducting coaching meetings from those who are less effective.

The Seven-Step Model

1. Building a Relationship of Mutual Trust
2. Opening the Meeting
3. Getting Agreement
4. Exploring Alternatives
5. Getting a Commitment to Act
6. Handling Excuses
7. Closing the Meeting.

Target Audience

The *Coaching Skills Inventory* instrument is appropriate for use with individual managers, a group of managers or supervisors in a department or work unit, or all the managers in an entire organization. It can also be used with prospective managers to help them prepare for their future coaching responsibilities.

Purpose

The *Coaching Skills Inventory* can be used to:

- To acquaint managers, supervisors, and team leaders with a model for conducting effective coaching meetings that will have a positive impact on an employee's job performance.
- Help managers identify their coaching strengths and weaknesses, and compare this to a sample of more than 100 managers from a variety of industries and job functions.
- Support appraisal and performance management systems.

Learning Outcomes

- Identify strengths and weaknesses in specific coaching meeting skills
- Impact employee job performance using the model for effective coaching meetings
- Measure progress by comparing skills after training to those before taking the assessment

Administration

The *Coaching Skills Inventory* Assessment can be self-administered and self-scored.

Response Time: Participants should be given about 20-30 minutes to complete the print assessment.

Scoring Time: Participants should be given about 20 minutes to score the assessment.

Workshop Time: The full workshop will take 3 hours.

What does it mean to coach?

It means sitting down with the employee in a structured meeting to address a specific pattern of behavior — with the aim of redirecting that behavior toward a more productive outcome. This 7-step process ensures that the manager will create and maintain the level of mutual respect that's necessary to effect a genuine change in the employee's behavior.

- Kenneth R. Phillips

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Coaching Skills Inventory

Facilitator Guide

SAMPLE

Kenneth R. Phillips

3rd Edition

[a coaching assessment and step-by-step meeting model]

Background Information

A company's reputation for quality and service depends on how well its managers, supervisors, and team leaders guide employees to achieve excellence. Only managers, supervisors, and team leaders with well-developed coaching skills can successfully lead employees to greater productivity. Skilled coaches understand that sustained superior employee performance is achieved not by means of control, but through regular coaching — coaching that recognizes and reinforces positive employee performance, helps employees come to recognize problem areas in their own performance that they cannot see on their own, and empowers employees to improve in those areas.

Skillful coaches are also aware that successful coaching can only be achieved by establishing and nurturing an effective communication approach which is based on a satisfying coaching meeting process, not on control of its content. In fact, an essential difference between expert managers and their average counterparts is their ability to maintain a relationship with each employee that centers on regular coaching throughout the employee's work life.

But most managers, supervisors, and team leaders don't possess the requisite skills to succeed at coaching. Typically, they are uncomfortable with the whole idea of discussing performance issues with an employee. As a result, most managers approach coaching situations by:

1. Ignoring problems in hopes they will go away.
2. Offering a little friendly advice or giving the employee a morale-boosting pep talk.
3. Issuing a stern warning to "straighten up or suffer the consequences."
4. Telling employees what they have done wrong and how to do it right.
5. Assuming that nothing can be done, so why waste time? Terminate the employee now.

Although used extensively, none of these approaches are likely to succeed. Ignoring performance problems rarely causes them to get better. Friendly advice typically goes unheeded. Stern warnings invariably cause defensiveness, anger, and apathy but not behavior change. Telling an employee what is wrong and what to do right fosters dependency, and potentially sets up the manager for failure if the proposed solution does not work. Terminating an employee is almost never appropriate as an initial response — only as a last resort.

These attempts at coaching almost always lead to failure. And the failure is due to poorly trained managers, supervisors, and team leaders — not poorly motivated employees. However, as Orth, Wilkerson and Benfari (1987) point out, there are some clear benefits to a manager, supervisor, or team leader for becoming an effective coach. A manager can (1) gain additional time to enhance his or her own abilities and performance; (2) improve his or her chances for promotion by gaining a reputation as a developer of employees; and (3) develop an ever-expanding source of power in an organization via the mutually beneficial relationships with employees that he or she has helped succeed.

Orth et al. also identify a list of probable outcomes that would accrue to an organization with a critical mass of managers, supervisors, and team leaders who practiced effective coaching techniques (p. 67). Among these outcomes are stronger management teams at all levels of the organization, enhanced overall managerial performance, a less stressful atmosphere for all employees, a reduction in personnel problems, a growing sense of teamwork and mutual support among employees, a lessening in the incidence of power struggles and infighting, and a shift in focus from internal competition to a healthy, outward-directed competitiveness.

Despite these many benefits, coaching remains an often overlooked and under-utilized management function in a large number of organizations according to John Kottler (1985). In his book, *Power and Influence*, Kottler writes, "Although almost all large corporations, and many small ones too, acknowledge the importance of mentoring, coaching, sponsoring and role modeling for the development of their next generation of leaders, few seem to do a very good job in this regard."

There are many reasons why coaching is so often neglected in many organizations. Here are four of the most critical:

1. Organizations often do not reward their managers, supervisors, and team leaders for learning and practicing skills to become effective coaches. As has been well documented in behavior modification literature, people do those things for which they receive rewards and recognition and they stop doing those things for which there is no reward.

2. Managers are unaware of the benefits to themselves, their employees, and their organization for becoming effective coaches.

3. Managers, supervisors, and team leaders are ineffective at conducting meetings because they lack good models. They need a boss or co-worker who does an effective job of conducting coaching meetings and whose behavior they can emulate. Unfortunately, few bosses or co-workers can be found who are good models, due in large part to reasons 1 and 2.

4. Changing one's management style requires a major commitment of time, training, practice, and perhaps even a change in attitude.

The *Coaching Skills Inventory* is designed to help managers, supervisors, and team leaders improve their skills in conducting effective coaching meetings and overcome, in part, some of the previously discussed obstacles. Inventory results will help managers, supervisors, and team leaders identify their strengths and improvement needs in conducting effective coaching meetings, thus motivating them to want to spend time learning, practicing, and incorporating effective coaching meeting skills into their management style. In addition, a model for conducting effective coaching meetings will be introduced.

Facilitator Guide Sample

The 7-Step Coaching Meeting

An effective coaching meeting can be viewed as a process consisting of 7 steps:

1. Building a Relationship of Mutual Trust
2. Opening the Meeting
3. Getting Agreement
4. Exploring Alternatives
5. Getting a Commitment to Act
6. Handling Excuses
7. Closing the Meeting.

All the steps except Building a Relationship of Mutual Trust are included in the Inventory. The Coaching Meeting Process Model in Figure 4, which also appears on page 11 of the Participant Guide, shows this 7-step process.

The steps and skills comprising the Model are all grounded in behavioral science research and have been found to distinguish managers who are effective at conducting coaching meetings from those who are less effective. (Orth et al., 1987; Fournies, 1978; and Stowell & Starcevich, 1987).

The Foundation

Building a Relationship of Mutual Trust

The Skills

Support
Empathize, Agree, and *Praise* to show understanding or give recognition.

Self-Disclose
Share personal information about experiences and inner feelings.

The Steps

Opening the Meeting

Restate Purpose
Refer in a friendly manner (without evaluating) to a specific reason for meeting.

Getting Agreement

Specify Behavior
1. Using numbers, cite specific examples of employee's behavior.
2. Clarify performance expectations.
3. Ask for agreement on issue.

Clarify Consequences
1. Probe for employee understanding of consequences (natural and imposed).
2. Ask for agreement on issue.

Exploring Alternatives

React
1. Acknowledge employee suggestion.
2. Discuss benefits and drawbacks.
3. Ask employee for other suggestions.

Expand
1. Offer suggestions.
2. Discuss benefits and drawbacks.

Getting a Commitment to Act

Probe
Encourage employee to talk by asking questions.

Open — Cannot be answered yes or no.

Closed — Use to get employee to focus on a specific issue.

Support
Agree and *Praise* to reinforce what employee says.

Closing the Meeting

Summarize
1. Consolidate what was discussed.
2. Thank employee for contributions.
3. Let employee know you plan to follow up.

Handling Excuses
Use at any point if necessary during the meeting.

Rephrase Point
Reword remark perceived by employee as blaming or accusatory into one that encourages employee to examine own behavior.

Respond Empathically
Communicate understanding of employee feelings and point of view.

Figure 4. Coaching Meeting Process Model

Facilitator Guide Sample

Coaching Skills Inventory Workshop At-a-Glance

9:00–9:10AM*	**Introduce the Program**	Welcome participants and explain the general benefits of attending the program. Give participants the opportunity to introduce themselves to each other.
9:10–9:30AM	**Overview and Activity**	Give participants an overview of the Coaching Skills Workshop and get an idea of their expectations for the program.
9:30–9:55AM	**Characteristics of an "Expert" at Coaching Meetings**	Have participants brainstorm possible characteristics of an expert at conducting coaching meetings. Introduce the 12 behaviors that distinguish supervisors, managers, and team leaders who are highly effective at conducting coaching meetings from their average counterparts.
9:55–10:20AM	**Completing the Inventory**	Instruct participants to complete the *Coaching Skills Inventory*.
10:20–10:30AM	**Break**	
10:30–11:10AM	**The Coaching Meeting Process**	Introduce the Coaching Meeting Process Model and examine each step of the model in-depth.
11:10–11:30AM	**Scoring the Inventory**	Participants score their Inventories and create a visual representation of their individual scores.
11:30–11:50AM	**Interpreting Your Scores**	Have participants read the interpretive information in their Participant Guides, answer questions to help identify some concrete steps for their own growth, and share their reactions to their scores with each other.
11:50AM–12:00PM	**Conclusion**	Review expectations to see that they have been met. Solicit final questions.

*Sample schedule for workshop

Free resource from author Ken Phillips

The Secret to Disarming Employee Excuses

By Ken Phillips
President, Phillips Associates

For more free resources visit
HRDQstore.com/coachskills

The Secret to Disarming Employee Excuses

By Kenneth R. Phillips
President, Phillips Associates

"The three most common and ineffective ways supervisors deal with excuses are: (1) accept the excuse outright without question, (2) discount the excuse by suggesting it's not important, or (3) argue about the legitimacy of the excuse."

How many times have you heard: "That's not my job." "I've done it that way for years." "It's not my fault." "I didn't have enough time." Sound familiar? These are just a few of the litany of excuses employees (and yes, sometimes even ourselves) offer to explain why something wasn't accomplished as expected.

Excuses can occur in every type of supervisor/employee interaction — from giving constructive feedback about a particular aspect of an employee's performance through coaching an employee to help the employee improve performance in a certain area to discussing an employee's past performance during a performance appraisal discussion. Excuses can also arise in interactions between peers as well as between a team leader and a team member. In short, excuses are likely to be encountered in almost any type of interaction situation and on an almost daily basis.

Three most common methods

Despite their frequency, few supervisors know how to handle excuses effectively. The three most common and ineffective ways supervisors deal with excuses are: (1) accept the excuse outright without question, (2) discount the excuse by suggesting it's not important, or (3) argue about the legitimacy of the excuse.

Accepting an excuse without question sends a message that not accomplishing something as expected is acceptable. In short, it reinforces further use of excuses.

Discounting an excuse by suggesting it's not important has the effect of temporarily removing the excuse from the discussion. But, because the excuse was not adequately dealt with, it is likely to reappear later in the conversation. Discounting an excuse is analogous to placing the proverbial genie in a bottle and putting a cork in the opening — sooner or later the cork pops out, and out comes the genie again. Here is an example of discounting an excuse:

Employee: "I hear what you're saying, but I've always done it the other way."

Supervisor: "Don't worry about how you did it in the past. Just follow the new procedure I outlined for you."

In this example, the supervisor has minimized the importance of the excuse, but not adequately disarmed it. As a result, the excuse is likely to reappear later in the same conversation or in any subsequent conversations on the same topic. In addition, the employee is likely to feel personally discounted by the supervisor's

"...arguing about an excuse results in a win/lose struggle between supervisor and employee and has the effect of refocusing the discussion away from the topic being discussed and onto the excuse."

response, which, if true, will contribute to the deterioration of open communication between supervisor and employee.

The most common method used by supervisors to disarm an excuse is to argue with the employee over its validity. This happens because supervisors are primarily concerned with achieving results and consequently, have difficulty viewing any excuse as valid. In fact, while conducting more than 200 coaching and performance appraisal training programs during the past 10 years, it was quite common to find several participants in every group who stated that they simply could not tolerate excuses. However, arguing about an excuse results in a win/lose struggle between supervisor and employee and has the effect of refocusing the discussion away from the topic being discussed and onto the excuse. Here is an example of arguing about an excuse:

Employee: "Other people don't meet all their deadlines, so I don't see why you're picking on me."

Supervisor: "We're not here to talk about other people! We're here to talk about you and why you can't seem to get your assignments completed on time!"

In this example, the supervisor's response sets up a likely argument over whether or not other people miss deadlines. Moreover, if an argument does ensue, then the meeting focus shifts from the employee's behavior to whether others do or don't meet their deadlines. In addition, in any supervisor employee argument, the supervisor is most likely to "win" and the employee "lose" thus causing resentment, and making the employee less likely to view his or her not meeting deadlines as a problem.

Types of excuses

If accepting, discounting and arguing are not effective ways to disarm excuses, the key question is: "How should excuses be managed?" The answer is to disarm them as quickly as possible and permanently remove them from the discussion. However, before discussing how to permanently remove an excuse from a discussion, let's first look at the different types of excuses. While there are an almost countless number of different excuses, they can be categorized according to one of the four types: diversions, discounts, denials and half-truths. *Note: the handy reference chart on* *page 4 lists the four categories of excuses along with a definition of each, sample excuse statements, and guidelines for how to respond to each type of excuse.*

Diversions are excuses that redirect blame for a performance problem back to the supervisor. Some examples include: "That's not my job." "I didn't know that's what you wanted." "You never told me that." "No one ever told me it was a priority." "I thought someone else was going to do it." In each of these examples, the employee is saying that the supervisor didn't make his or her expectations clear.

Discounts are excuses that minimize the importance of a performance problem by referring to the past or pointing out that others behave in the same fashion. Some examples are: "It's been done that way for years." "I've never done it that way before." "My previous boss never said anything to me about this." "Other people do the same thing." In each of these examples, the employee is saying that there isn't a problem because there haven't been similar expectations in the past.

"In each of these examples, the employee is saying that the performance problem was caused by some extenuating circumstance."

Denials are outright rejections of any responsibility for a performance problem. Some examples include: "It's not my fault." "I hope you're not blaming me." "It didn't happen on my shift." In each of these examples, the employee is saying, "Don't blame me for the problem because I had nothing to do with it." In each of these examples, the employee is saying that while there might be a problem, it's not my fault.

Half-truths point out a possible obstacle as cause for a performance problem. Some examples of half-truths are: "I got sick." "I didn't get the paperwork." "I forgot." "I didn't have enough time." "The equipment didn't work." "I had personal problems." "I didn't have enough help." In each of these examples, the employee is saying that the performance problem was caused by some extenuating circumstance.

How to disarm excuses

As mentioned earlier, the key to managing excuses is to disarm them as quickly as possible and permanently remove them from the discussion. The trick, of course, is

Types of Excuses and Their Solutions

Category	Excuse: Employee Says...	Solution: You Do This...
Diversions Employee redirects blame for performance problem back to supervisor.	"That's not my job." "I didn't know that's what you wanted." "You never told me that." "No one ever told me it was a priority." "I thought someone else was going to do it."	• Accept partial responsibility for not making expectations clear. • Clarify your expectations for the future. • Note date and time of conversation.
Discounts Employee minimizes importance of performance problem by referring to past or pointing out that others do the same thing.	"It's been done that way for years." "I've never done it that way before." "My previous boss never said anything to me about this." "Other people do the same thing."	• Acknowledge that you see how your expectations could be a surprise if there haven't been similar expectations in the past. Or, agree that others have done the same thing. But point out that you're bringing it up because the employee has done it more frequently (cite specifics). • Clarify your expectations for the future. • Note date and time of conversation.
Denials Employee rejects responsibility for problem.	"It's not my fault." "I hope you're not blaming me." "It didn't happen on my shift."	• Let employee know you are not trying to cast blame. But you do want to talk about the situation and find a solution to prevent the issue from reoccurring. • Note date and time of conversation.
Half truths Employee points out possible obstacle as cause for performance problem.	"I got sick." "I didn't get the paperwork." "I forgot." "The equipment didn't work." "I didn't have enough time." "I didn't have enough help." "I had personal problems." "I didn't know how to do it."	*1st Time:* • Acknowledge excuse. Clarify your expectations. • Note date and time of conversation. *2nd Time:* • Remind employee of previous conversation. • Restate your expectations. • Turn into problem solving discussion. • Note date and time of discussion. *3rd Time:* • Remind employee of previous conversation. • Restate your understanding of agreement. • Ask for agreement on problem.

"Responding with empathy is particularly effective in handling excuses that fall into the diversion, discount and half-truth categories, while reframing is useful in handling denials."

how to do this. Determining the type of excuse is the first step (i.e. whether the excuse is a diversion, discount, denial or half-truth). Next, use one of the following two techniques to disarm and permanently remove the excuse from the discussion: (1) Respond with Empathy — acknowledge the excuse by communicating an understanding of the employee's feelings and point of view, and (2) Reframe — turn the excuse into a problem-solving discussion that encourages the employee to examine his or her performance. Responding with empathy is particularly effective in handling excuses that fall into the diversion, discount and half-truth categories, while reframing is useful in handling denials.

Examples of responding with empathy

Let's assume an employee has just offered the excuse: "That's not my job" (a diversion) as a reason for why a certain job task was not completed. A supervisor should respond by saying something like: "If I didn't make it clear earlier that doing the task is also part of your job, then I accept responsibility for that. And, so that there isn't any confusion in the future, let me make it clear that completing the task is part of your job."

Notice how this response neither accepts, dismisses nor creates an argument over the excuses validity. Instead it disarms the excuse by having the supervisor initially take the side of the employee and then, in the second part clarify what is expected in the future. In addition, after the discussion is completed, the supervisor should note the date and time of the conversation in the event the employee fails to complete the job task again and uses the excuse, "That's not my job."

This will enable the supervisor to take a firmer stand the next time by reminding the employee of the previous conversation and reiterating the future expectations that were mentioned during the discussion. The supervisor might also engage the employee in a problem-solving discussion at this point to find a solution the employee is committed to implementing that will prevent the situation from reoccurring.

If an employee uses the excuse: "It's been done that way for years" (a discount) as a reason for why some new job procedure was not followed, a supervisor should respond by saying something like: "You're right, and I can understand how the new procedure will require some adjustment on your part. However, in the future, I want you to understand that I expect you to follow the new job procedure and not the old."

Again, note how the supervisor's response initially takes the side of the employee and then goes on to clarify what's expected in the future. As in the previous example, the supervisor should also note the date and time of the conversation in the event the new job procedure is still not followed.

If an employee offers the excuse: "I got sick" (a half-truth) as a reason for why some deadline or job assignment was missed, a supervisor should respond by saying something like: "I know that can happen. Everyone gets sick once in a while and it certainly can affect your work. In the future, when you have major deadlines to meet or job assignments to complete, let's agree to meet at least twice per week in order to update your progress. In this way, we won't get caught short again if you get sick right before the deadline."

"Notice how this response avoids finding fault and instead reframes the excuse into a problem-solving discussion where supervisor and employee together attempt to find a solution that will prevent the situation from reoccurring."

As in the previous two examples, note how the supervisor initially takes the side of the employee and then goes on to clarify his or her future expectations about how the employee is to handle situations when there are deadlines or job assignments to complete. As before, the supervisor should also note the date and time of the conversation in the event the situation repeats itself and the supervisor needs to take a stronger stance.

Reframing

If an employee uses the excuse: "It's not my fault" (a denial) as a reason why something did or didn't happen, a supervisor should respond by saying something like: "I'm not saying it was your fault. I just wanted to discuss the situation with you and see if we could find a way to prevent it from happening again."

Notice how this response avoids finding fault and instead reframes the excuse into a problem-solving discussion where supervisor and employee together attempt to find a solution that will prevent the situation from reoccurring. Once again, the date and time of the conversation should be noted so that if the situation comes up again, the supervisor can take a stronger stance.

Recap

In summary, excuses can occur in almost any type of interaction. However, despite their frequency, few supervisors know how to disarm excuses effectively and permanently remove them from a discussion. The first step in becoming more effective is to determine the type of excuse that is given: diversion, discount, denial or half-truth. Next, respond to the excuse by (1) Responding with Empathy — acknowledging the excuse by communicating an understanding of the employee's feelings and point of view, or (2) Reframing — turning the excuse into a problem-solving discussion that encourages the employee to examine the performance situation.

Note: A strategy that can be employed to help you better disarm excuses when they occur in the future is to make a list of the most common excuses you hear, categorize them according to type, and then prepare a response using either the technique of Responding with Empathy or Reframing. Then the next time you hear one of these excuses, you will be prepared to disarm it and permanently remove it from the discussion.

"The first step in becoming more effective is to determine the type of excuse that is given: diversion, discount, denial or half-truth."

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