

3 QUESTIONS:

Put Me In (Business), Coach

With [John Baldoni](#), a leadership and communications consultant and coach who works with Fortune 500 companies as well as non-profits, including the University of Michigan. He is the author of six books on leadership, including the forthcoming *How Great Leaders Get Great Results* (McGraw-Hill 2006) and *Great Motivation Secrets of Great Leaders* (McGraw-Hill 2005).

Question: Why is coaching important to management?

Baldoni: Management today really is about working with people, bringing out their best so the team and organization can do its best. That parallels coaching. Coaching is an enabling process, providing people with tools and resources, as well as guidance, to succeed. Coaches also challenge and cajole; they push people to achieve their best. The secret to coaching is to find out what motivates people. For example, some of us want more money; others want promotions. All of us want to be recognized. Managers as coaches discover those motivational factors and use them to get their employees' attention and focus on opportunities for development.

Question: What skills should coaches possess?

Baldoni: Coaching comes down to three things: observation, listening and guidance. Legendary coach John Madden put it best: "Coaches watch for what they don't want to see, and listen for what they don't want to hear." That means they are observing how people perform as well as how they interact with others. Coaches are good listeners; you have to engage the employee in conversation and have a dialogue with him or her to build trust. And lastly you focus on areas for growth. Focus on areas of development that will enable the person to do his or her job better.

Question: What are some coaching tips, especially when it comes to achieving business objectives?

Baldoni: First, plan ahead. Focus on what you will say and why you will say it. Schedule a convenient time for both of you. Allow at least an hour. Open with a positive; tell the individual what he is doing right. Then focus on areas of weakness; these are opportunities for growth. For example, if the individual is not adhering to a budget, timeline or having difficulty with coworkers, ask why. You can state why such behavior is unacceptable. Provide ways to improve. Get the employee to suggest ways to improve as well as provide your own insights. Gain agreement on improvement; if there is no commitment to change, coaching is useless. Set a timeline for when improvement should occur. Schedule another time to meet, perhaps in a month or two months. In between, offer feedback, either face to face or even via e-mail. Be positive and upbeat.

If managers expect their people to help achieve departmental objectives like bringing projects in on time and on budget, they need to tell all of their employees what the objectives are, why they are important to the team and the organization. You need to engage your folks, often through coaching, with what they need to do to fulfill the business objectives. That requires time and patience as well as attention to how we fulfill the business objectives.

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