

The Coaching Manager

THE COACHING MANAGER 13:

In this first issue of 2002, I thought I would share with you some of my experiences while on my vacation over Christmas and New Year.

I tend to be very much a "people watcher" whether it is in a restaurant or waiting for a flight at an airport and I am always fascinated by people and the way that they behave and react.

Whilst on our self-catering holiday, we spent a lot of time eating out in cafes and restaurants and as such I had ample time to observe the behaviours of both waiting staff and customers. I saw some superb examples of the use of some of the coaching models that were touched upon in 2001.

CONTRACTING

There was one particular restaurateur who was excellent at this. He immediately greeted customers at the door as they wandered in (looking lost), with a cheery welcome and by introducing himself. He also asked the customers their names. He then asked them what sort of food they were after and about where they would be most comfortable in sitting. On one particular evening, when the restaurant was busy, he also explained that perhaps service might not be as quick as usual due to the popularity of the restaurant that evening. Did anyone complain, or leave? Not that I saw.

What had this restaurateur done that could be applied to management and coaching?

1. He put people at ease by smiling and "including" them. How often do we as managers put people at their ease and make them feel included? How often have we left the new trainee to fend for themselves on a month's long training course whilst convincing ourselves that their inclusion to the company is the responsibility of the Training Department? I know of a senior manager who will not be pro-active in introducing himself to sub-ordinates. His attitude is such that "he is the boss" and people should come to introduce themselves to him not the other way round. Not sure if I agree with that one!

2. He managed their expectations in that they knew exactly what sort of food he served and about the level of service they could expect. How often as managers do we expect our employees to know how we operate as managers because they should "know what a boss does"?

AWARENESS:

A waiter in another restaurant showed fantastic awareness of his customers. Not only did he check how his customers were finding the food and the service he was constantly on the lookout for signs of both dissatisfaction and satisfaction. If he picked up on a facial expression that indicated the customer did not like the food he immediately picked up on the fact and asked the customer what was wrong. On a couple of occasions I saw him replace the food. Similarly he would pick up on expressions that indicated delight with the food. A personal example of his awareness was the fact that, not being a "pudding man" I tended to

partake of a port instead of an ice cream or something heavier. Port tends to go down quicker than apple pie and this waiter noticed this and was quick to realise that I may need another port to "fill the gap" whilst my family finished their desserts! A good example of awareness filling a customer need and of increasing sales!

As a manager/coach how is your awareness of your own needs and the needs of your employees/coachees? Are you constantly aware of their satisfactions and dissatisfactions? If you are not picking up on facial expressions and body language are you asking them directly how things are going? Too many managers when asked how their employees are, and how well they are doing, do not really know and as a result make assumptions only to find out to their cost later on when something has not been quite right.

RESPONSIBILITY:

I came across a good example and a bad example of this on holiday. The bad example was in a bar when the bottled beer ran out. The barman immediately blamed the suppliers when it turned out later that he had missed the order deadline. His credibility with me plummeted.

The good example was the man we hired our car from. He admitted up front that he had forgotten to include a "booster" seat for my five-year-old daughter and that it was his fault and that he would rectify it immediately. No "we couldn't find the right one" or "are you sure you asked for one" responses. His manner pleased us and the fact that he admitted responsibility helped calm our frustrations.

As a manager/coach do you take responsibility or when things go wrong do you tend to blame others when perhaps some of your actions/interventions may have been the root cause. I have seen many examples over the years of managers blaming their reps for a team's underperformance when perhaps they should have looked at their own behaviours and attitudes. I am always amazed at those sales managers who blame sales representatives for poor performance when they themselves have hand picked the said representatives! On very few occasions I have ever seen a manager stand up and say, "I made a recruitment mistake there!" or "I hold my hand up and admit to not supporting the reps development as much as I should have done".

PRAISE:

Praise is the most powerful form of feedback in terms of motivation. I saw a number of examples of no praise what so ever and one example of excellent praise. This example was a restaurant manager who had high awareness and he monitored the movements of both customers and staff. He was obviously monitoring a couple of "trainee" waiters and on several occasions he intervened to adjust what the waiter was doing although it was done very supportively and always with a pat on the shoulder of the waiter and with a smile. Even when one young lad dropped some cutlery beside some customers he was quickly in to support with the comments to the customer that "he is young, he learns, but he will be a great waiter!" Fantastic! How often do you praise your staff as a manager?