

# Front Line Coaching – getting the engine room productive

The global boom in demand for commodities means that it is not uncommon today to see industrial sites experiencing greater than 20 per cent annual staff turnover. In response, immense amounts of internal resources and profits are being used to advertise, recruit and induct new workers. But getting the most out of your people in a “boom” environment requires more than just rapid recruiting.

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**T**HE SURGE of expansions currently underway in heavy industry means that more organisations are fighting for a finite number of skilled and experienced front line leaders. Flowing from this, there are large numbers of employees being hired without the traditional industry background and many who are being promoted more rapidly than historically was the case.

No longer can businesses rely on historic methods of training their people – a few courses and leave people in their rôle long enough that they learn from experienced people around them. People are moving too fast between roles and companies to be able to provide that type of mentoring, and the business needs its new promotes and new hires to get up to speed faster than before.

This need is not always driven by a commodities boom. In South Africa, for example, the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation requiring a rapid transition of a high portion of management positions to previously disadvantaged groups is causing a more compounding rate of change in the demographics of the management ranks. By definition a high portion of this group had not had access to the skills, training and experience required for these roles.

If performance is to be maintained within Australian companies, proactive training and coaching programs need to be put in place to ensure that people are successful, and that productivity improvements continue to buffer profits from the sky-rocketing material and services costs we are experiencing.

Of course, senior management has for some time understood that effective frontline management is critical to improved performance. But it has been unsure where to begin and many have been disappointed with the lack of sustained impact from time-consuming and costly off-site training courses.



A key reason for this lack of impact is that frontline managers return from training to the same environment and the same management and support systems that were in place when they left. An effective solution must address skills, systems and support around these managers in a systematic way. In essence the key is to turn theory into practice with a coach on hand ‘at the coal face’ – and continuing to practice frontline management skills and habits until they are ingrained into the daily habits of supervisors.

Frontline coaching is an evolutionary process that begins with making supervisors aware of their KPIs, what is important to manage, how to manage it and how to deal with variance in order to achieve targeted results. Parallel to this, frontline coaching, ensures that the necessary supports are in place to best position the supervisor to achieve KPIs.

A typical starting point is to conduct a ‘Day in the Life Of’ (DILO) study. By observing and categorising where frontline managers are spending their time and by creating a dialogue about where they should

ideally be spending their time in order to deliver the key KPIs, this group gains valuable information about where losses are occurring, why and what might be done to resolve them.

Having frontline coaches work directly with the supervisors to facilitate the development of skills, tools and procedures is the key to ensuring the identified improvements are imbedded and full realisation of benefits is achieved.

For example, a supervisor might be coached on how to run effective shift handovers and daily review meetings with their team.

Working with a frontline coach, supervisors often begin to see results and move past mechanical compliance to achieve a rich understanding and, ultimately, ownership and continuous improvement.

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