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smart **Advice for Success!** Business™ matters

The Coach: MVP

On the field, courts, or in the office, successful coaches are getting more notice and may very well be their institutions' "most valuable players."



Winning Ways. As a manager or owner, it is important that you coach your team to success. Coaches may take different approaches to assembling, motivating, and running a team, but they also share certain habits. They have the ability to create a strategy and set short and long term goals and energize the team to strive to accomplish them. Coaches assess, communicate with, and recognize their employees. A successful coach can be the edge a team needs and the difference between winning and losing – whether in sports or in business. To infuse winning ways in your team, put on your coach's hat, and fire them up to help them make the most of their skills.

Strategize for Success A good coach has a solid game plan – one that has been well thought out and detailed, but not so rigid that it is never altered to meet unexpected problems and changes in the marketplace. The competition is always shifting, and – to a degree – your plan should track the shifts. As coach of your team, it is vital that you share with your employees your vision for your business and your action plan. Be sure everyone understands the goal and that you and your team remain focused on it.

Assess Individual Strengths Assess the strengths of each of your employees, and give them roles they can accomplish and which also provide professional growth. Consider each employee's demonstrated and transferable skills as well as skills requiring improvement. Don't discount an employee's enthusiasm and willingness to take on a new challenge. Also learn the individual goals of each employee. The more you know about your employees, the better you will be able to fit them into your game plan.

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Keep it Simple, Easy on the Eyes, and Fresh

In order to compete in business these days, you need to keep a web presence. Is yours more appealing than your competition's? Here are three simple keys to increase your web appeal.



Keep it Simple.

Put yourself in your customers' shoes. When they reach your website, you want them to be able to purchase a product or find the information they need – quickly. They don't want to sift through irrelevant information to find what they need. Customers in a hurry won't waste time clicking from page to page to navigate your site. Make their visit pleasurable, and keep them coming back again and again.

An easy approach to an appealing site is to minimize the number of pages. Three to five pages of good content is better than 10 to 20 pages of material customers may not need. Industry and company needs vary, but these pages are usually enough:

- a home page with links to other key pages,
- an "about us" page,
- easy-to-find contact information,
- key pages to showcase your company's services and products, and
- a simple and easy online ordering page if needed.

Customers may lose interest after two or three clicks. Give some thought to the infrastructure of your website and be sure customers can navigate easily from one page to any other page to help them access information more quickly and prevent them from hitting dead-ends within your website.

Keep it Easy on the Eyes.

Most businesses should avoid dark and busy backgrounds that distract from content and make text difficult to read. A dark or black background for a photography site makes for a dramatic effect – but it is easier to view and read dark text against a lighter background.

Font choice has been fairly limited for website design, and that may not necessarily be a bad thing. Arial and Verdana fonts are two of the most popular and easy to read. Some sites try to change things up with script fonts. While a little script might be appropriate for a wedding invitation site, keep in mind that it's difficult to read and should be limited to headlines, not the entire text content. An easy way to build contrast between textual content is to separate information into appropriate paragraphs and add bold headers and subheads in a size or two larger than the text. Subheads help to guide your readers' eyes down the page, and paragraphs help them navigate content more easily and provide their eyes with a resting place.

On the web, a reader's eyes tend to travel down the left and across, tracing a path similar to an "F" or "E". So why make it more difficult by centering your text across the page? Content on websites is generally better "flush left."

Keep it Fresh.

If you have a website and rarely update it or look at it, you might as well have no website at all. Many small businesses may be able to get away with updating on a quarterly or monthly basis. But if you are trying to make your site a "must visit," or your company provides weekly or daily communication, you must make updates a priority. There's nothing worse than going to a website and discovering "brand new" content dated two years ago. To keep your customers coming back, you can post promotions on line, create a carefully worded professional blog, or feature an accessible, downloadable quarterly or monthly newsletter in PDF format.

The bottom line is, always put yourself in your customers' shoes. Once you've got a clean, effective site, keep it updated by adding new content or updates and moving – or removing – older material. To drive customers to your site, don't forget to promote your website in every piece of printed material you hand out!

Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not; it is the first lesson that ought to be learned; and however early a man's training begins, it is probably the last lesson that he learns thoroughly.

THOMAS H. HUXLEY, ENGLISH BIOLOGIST
(1825 - 1895)

The Right Fit

Get off to a good start - find the right person for the right job.

Hiring: Risky Business? Some businesses seem to be able to have no problem finding the right person for an open position, while others take months, and sometimes years to bring the right employee on board. For small businesses, hiring people can be risky business. For example, if you're a one-person shop, whether you're bringing on a secretary, salesperson, or service provider, that new hire is about to account for 50% of your business activity. While that thought might send a little shiver down your spine, don't let it stop you from getting the star performer you require.

A Great Place to Work Why do some companies seem to hire all the great employees? Well, they might be great places to work. To attract great employees, providing an appealing and professional environment in which to work is a good start. While you're determining if prospects are a good fit, they're determining if they really want to work in your office for you. The environment and your demeanor will make a difference, so analyze your own strengths and shortcomings before proceeding.

Wrong Job, Right Person Businesses often place the right person into the wrong job. Before you advertise for a new position or vacancy, write a job description and write down the skill sets and core competencies you seek from a new employee. When reading prospects' resumes or conducting interviews, ask yourself how closely their experiences fit your needs and if the skills they possess are transferable. A stellar salesman may not be the best fit for a sales manager position, and vice versa. Be sure to consider the growth factor. The person you consider the most "perfect fit" may be easily bored by a lack of challenge or may not be able to ramp up for growth. Pay is another aspect that can be a deal-breaker. What are other businesses in your industry paying for their help? Do a little bit of research and carefully consider how much you can afford to offer. If you do find the right talent for a position that doesn't exist, it might be a good time to step back, consider other growth opportunities for your business, and keep the prospect's name on file.

Sharpen Listening Skills to Find the Best Fit When interviewing a prospect, be sure to spend a lot of time listening. Ask open-ended questions to encourage the prospect to talk about strengths and weaknesses, past successes, and future goals. Listen carefully to responses, and probe for more information. In the interview, talk about your company's mission, goals, and future growth to gauge your prospect's responses. Be prepared to field questions from your interviewee. Will the prospect support your ideas? Does she or he appear enthusiastic about your current or future endeavors or perhaps bring something unexpected and promising to the table? Be honest about the negative as well as the positive aspects of the company and position. Remember, you are trying to hire an employee who will bring excellent performance and enthusiasm to meet your short-term and long-term needs.

Selecting the right person for the right job is the largest part of coaching.

PHILIP CROSBY, *REFLECTIONS ON QUALITY*

Six Essential Qualities that Determine our Success in Business

Dr. Henry Cloud, a clinical psychologist, believes that to be successful, the makeup of a person matters more than talent – it depends upon six characteristics that he believes define integrity:

- the ability to connect with others and build trust
- recognition of reality and the ability to face it
- the capacity to "finish well" – to work in a way that yields results
- the wisdom to embrace negative realities and skill to work towards a solution
- an orientation toward growth and improvement in all facets of life
- understanding of the transcendent in life

from *integrity: the courage to meet the demands of reality* by Dr. Henry Cloud

Encourage Professional Development Providing employees with proper training to learn new skills and improve on their abilities is important. For entry-level employees, that may mean showing them how you want them to perform crucial tasks. For management, focus on expected results and negotiable and non-negotiable actions. Cross-training employees for various roles can be a win-win: a well-rounded employee becomes more of an asset to your business, and new experiences allow an experienced employee to stretch her comfort level, cultivate new proficiencies, and feel better about her work.

Recognize Positive Behaviors and Actions

Managers are often so focused on catching the negative that they forget to reinforce the positive. As coach of your team, it is important that you recognize achievements and efforts when an employee exhibits positive behaviors or performs a task well. This encourages those actions to continue in the future and provides a blueprint for further success.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Good coaches communicate well on a number of levels. Their expectations and directions are clear and tailored to each individual. They often alter their coaching style to get the best out of each employee. Their ability to individualize communications often fosters a greater rapport and understanding between coach and player. Effective communication should not be limited to meeting time. To begin to build that rapport, provide immediate feedback regarding problems or successes, pass along your knowledge where appropriate, and solicit ideas and opinions. Be sincere in your actions and encouraging in your words.

Performance Appraisals Benefit Small Businesses Too

You may think there is no benefit to conducting performance appraisals for several employees – or even one – but think again!



It may seem unnecessary to conduct a performance appraisal with only one employee or a few. However, it can be an opportunity to reinforce your appreciation of an employee's talent and to strengthen an employee's performance. It can serve as a guide to achieve future objectives or set an underperforming employee back on track.

Even though you may have plenty of face time with a crackerjack small staff, sitting down with each of them to talk more formally on a regular basis gives you the opportunity to tell each what results or behaviors they have displayed that you think are most advantageous to your business. Use examples and be specific! It boosts morale, encourages them to continue to perform, and adds to their job satisfaction and loyalty. It also provides a safe forum for them to discuss their future goals, to discuss opportunities to develop their talents, or maybe even to offer new insights on growing the business.

You won't require a lot of forms or extensive questions, but you need to know what qualities make a difference to you in employee performance. Two basic considerations are behaviors that you want to see and the results you expect. Once you have identified the expected behaviors and results, conducting performance reviews provides you with the opportunity to let your staff know what you expect from them, what they're doing right, and what needs to change. For a new employee, a timely performance evaluation can clearly identify or reinforce your expectations and let the employee know how he or she is meeting them.

Performance reviews for small businesses also are crucial for identifying and correcting results and behaviors that could cripple your business. A small business with two employees is more severely impacted by substandard results or negative behavior than a business of 50. In a shop of two people, one underperforming employee is 50% of your work force. Think of the impact that could have on your customer base!

If you have a small workforce, chances are that you rely heavily upon their talents and their customer interaction to build a successful business. You can use the performance appraisal tool to keep that staff functioning at its best.