

## COACHING AND COUNSELING IN YOUR MANAGEMENT ROUTINE

**M**idlevel associates are judged not only on their work product but also on their ability to supervise others. This underscores the importance of communicating with junior associates.

Jay Sullivan of Exec/Comm advised the attendees of the City Bar's Professional Development Breakfast Workshop, "The Successful Attorney-Manager: Delivering Constructive Feedback," that there are basically two ways to communicate, as a coach and as a counselor. A good supervisor, says Sullivan, is both an energetic coach and a supportive counselor.

Able coaching develops a junior associate's skills and increases their productivity, while counseling, says Sullivan, can solve problems before they become unmanageable and promote better working relationships.

Employing coaching and counseling into your management routine will save you time and improve your image as a good supervising attorney.

### Coaching

Coaching is best used to develop legal skills, train new associates, advise associates about technology changes or business focus changes that require additional skills and provide ongoing

feedback about work performance. Coaching, says Sullivan, is straight forward and directive and should be kept as brief as possible.

At a coaching session, according to Sullivan, there is a multi-step process. First, remember to praise the junior associate's job performance and highlight what he or she is doing well. This sets the tone for the session.

Next, raise the specific issue at hand and try to describe it in one sentence. Make sure that the time is right to give feedback by asking would it be all right to talk about this issue right now? You don't want to be giving feedback if the associate is exceptionally busy or facing a deadline.

If it is a good time to talk, start by identifying both successes and challenges, then look to solve the challenges collaboratively. Don't only offer your own suggestions, notes Sullivan, but ask the associate for solutions. It is important to keep an open mind. Finally, explore the next steps to remedy any problems and choose specific actions to take.

Ideally, says Sullivan, as a supervisor you should be having this type of feedback/coaching session throughout the year. It is not very useful to wait until a year-end review to outline problems that occurred earlier in the year. Instead, says Sullivan, think of the year-end review as a summary of what was already discussed throughout the year.

Being a great coach, advises Sullivan, means having a clear vision, articulating it frequently and taking the junior associate beyond the successful completion of a given task.

### Counseling

In your role as supervisor, there will likely be times when a junior associate approaches you with a personal problem he or she is having at work, or a need arises to respond to the associate's non-performance-based behavior. In cases

like this your role is more of a counselor than a coach, advises Sullivan.

When you are counseling your role is to be supportive. Counseling, says Sullivan, is employee centered. Your role is to listen, advise, and help the associate move toward a solution. Counseling is best used to help solve personal problems, compensation or benefit changes, changes in responsibilities, and difficult or negative behavior. Remember, says Sullivan, your role is not to solve the problem but to help the person work through the problem.

First, seek a private place to have the conversation. State or let the associate state the problem. Respond to the emotion the issue evokes and try to empathize. Before you can offer any help, says Sullivan, you must first show the person you understand what he or she is going through. Once you sense the associate is ready, try to get the person to focus on the problem and guide him or her to a solution. Use open ended questions like, "What are you doing?" and "How is it working?". When it is time to come up with an action plan try to let the solution come from the associate. An associate who comes up with the solution will be more likely to implement it, says Sullivan.

Effective coaching and counseling enhances the junior associate's skills, builds confidence and motivation and shows you have the supervisory skills necessary to succeed at the firm.

For more information on the Professional Development Breakfast Workshops and a complete schedule of upcoming sessions, please visit [www.nycbar.com](http://www.nycbar.com).