

Pull the triggers

A growing number of employers are placing significant emphasis on coaching employees instead of simply managing them. These organizations realize the value employees can contribute if they are nurtured and developed properly. And employees are welcoming this new trend.

Millennials now make up about one-third of Canada's private sector workforce, according to Statistics Canada.

And 89 per cent of millennials said "it's important to be constantly learning at my job," according to MTV's "No Collar Workers" study in 2012, while 75 per cent want a mentor.

No one likes to be managed anymore but we sure do like to be coached. Even senior executives hire personal coaches.

Switching to a more coaching-oriented style of management is certainly a solid step in the right direction. This is particularly true for employees in knowledge-based and service-based organizations where processes are less defined, employees have more discretionary latitude and performance measurements are often subjective.

The benefits of coaching are readily apparent, but how does an organization convert from a command-and-control model to this more mentor-based system?

The main challenge rests with the managers themselves. They must change the way they conduct themselves; they must change their managerial habits.

Managers often say, "People are our most important asset," yet few managers actually focus on improving these assets. Employees are lucky if they have a semi-annual performance review. Some even miss their annual appraisals if they don't remind their bosses.

And when they do have them,



Morgan Smyth
LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

it's usually little more than just a formality. Most managers approach these reviews as "Oh yes, it's Cassidy's review date tomorrow. Now, let me think, how has she done this past year?"

Not only are these reviews ineffective, they can be demotivators. Managers tend to focus more on the flubs than the feats — so, change in this aspect of management would be a welcome shift.

To do this effectively, managers must devote a considerable portion of their time to it. Now many will say, "But I'm already too busy just managing this bunch — how am I going to find time to coach them as well?"

The answer is: delegate, delegate, delegate. Whenever a new task lands on a manager's desk, the first question to pop into her mind should be "Who else here can do this?"

The same is true for existing tasks. Don't own any tasks that someone else can do and don't inherit any. If an employee presents a problem to his manager, this manager must deflect it right back to the employee.

There was a great article in 1999 in the *Harvard Business Review* titled "Time Management: Who's Got The Monkey?" that explains how.

How do managers fall into this

habit? Well, many think, "Nobody can do this job as well as I can" and end up taking on the task themselves. Of course they are wrong. Think of a small business. Where do you usually find the owner? Typically in the back room, head down, producing products. And what are all the other workers doing?

It conjures up the image of a construction site where the worker wearing the white hard-hat is in the pit dutifully shovelling away while those wearing yellow hard-hats are standing nearby, leaning on their shovels, watching.

Harold Geneen's famous quote "Management must manage!" can be updated to "Management must coach!" Once the manager delegates all possible responsibilities and learns to avoid taking on those of others, she will certainly have time to do exactly that.

To change these old habits, Michael Bungay Stanier, author of *Do More Great Work*, and Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*, agree the manager must first identify what is triggering these habits in the first place. What is it that causes a manager to either take on someone else's responsibilities or tell that person how to do it? Instead, why doesn't she simply ask, "What are you going to do about it?" or "How would you go about it?"

Once she determines what is triggering these "change of ownership" and these "telling, not asking" behaviours, her next step is to find ways to stop them: "What causes me to immediately tell him my solution before I have even asked him what he thinks should be done?"

Engrained habits cannot be replaced overnight. They take time. The best way to achieve change is to break the process down into

manageable bites. B.J. Fogg of TinyHabits.com says the secret is to define a first step that takes less than 60 seconds to do. Change this one small aspect of the whole triggering sequence and repeat it until it becomes a habit. Once it does, start changing the next trigger point. Repeat the process as often as necessary until the entirely new behavioural pattern is habitual.

Take our example of the "telling versus asking" habit. Here, the person could set a target of asking the members of her team five questions about their work each day. The next week, increase it to six questions.

Ask each member about his approach to a task. What results does he expect to achieve? What resources will he require? Once the task is completed, what did he learn from the experience? Is there anything he would do differently next time? And... what else? Get into the habit of asking questions. Pretty soon, the habit of asking replaces the habit of telling.

Being mindful of what we say or ask and, more importantly, what we don't say or ask, has a significant impact on our behaviours and our habits. By watching our own conduct, we can change from being the old dictatorial-style manager to become an inspiring coach. If we do, our load will lighten, our sense of accomplishment will increase and our team members will be more productive and emboldened to do their best.

Morgan Smyth is an SCNetwork thought leader and a change management consultant who launched his own IT services company which soared to Profit Magazine's 50 Fastest Growing Companies. He is based in Toronto and can be reached at msmyth@braegen.com.