

Your role as a workplace coach

As a workplace coach you will coach the apprentice/trainee, act as a mentor and support someone embarking on a new career.

A good workplace coach will:

- Take a personal interest in the apprentice/trainee's development
- Communicate well and develop a rapport with the apprentice/trainee
- Provide feedback and progress reports
- Be a good role model

Be clear on your role and responsibilities, ask:

- What support is available to you in the workplace?
- Who is the workplace supervisor that you report to?
- What does the apprentice/trainee have to achieve and by when?
- Who is the training organisation and who is the contact person?
- Who else will be involved in training in the workplace?
- How do you get a copy of the Training Plan?
- How do you report the apprentice/trainee's progress?

Getting started

Develop a good relationship with the apprentice/trainee. Make sure you:

- Welcome the apprentice/trainee and introduce them to other staff
- Take an interest
- Ask questions
 - 'How's your work going?'*
 - 'Are you finding your way around the place okay?'*
 - 'How're your classes going?'*
 - 'Is there anything I can do to help?'*

Training tips

People learn best when actively involved in their learning. When teaching a new task ensure your apprentice/trainee knows:

- Why you are doing things
- Why these things are relevant
- Why these things are important
- How and when assessment will occur

Giving instructions

Take time to think about the instructions you give. Write down the instructions or break the job into steps if necessary. To give clear instructions you should:

- Assume no prior knowledge
- Explain why the job/task is done this way
- Use clear and simple language
- Include safe work practices in your instructions
- Ask questions to check for understanding
- Make sure there are no distractions

Show and tell

Take time to show the apprentice/trainee how to do things the correct way. Observing is a quick and very effective way to learn - it allows you to:

- Demonstrate
- Explain why the task is done this way
- Use correct work practices

Practise, practise, practise

Allow time for the apprentice/trainee to practise new skills. Expect mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes. Point the apprentice/trainee in the direction of how they can do it right.

- Watch and coach:
- Be patient
- Ask questions to encourage the apprentice/trainee:
'That's right Sarah, now what's the next step?'
'If the engine won't start, what steps would you take to find the problem?'

Encourage and correct:

- Give praise where it is due
- Suggest techniques to improve:
'That's good Louise. Now you've mastered the register, I'd like you to concentrate on customer service.'

Ask questions

- Check for understanding:
'What is the first step in making an EFTPOS transaction?'
- Involve the learner in decision making:
'What do you think is the next step?'
- Obtain information and feedback:
'How is your training in the grocery department going? Is there anything you need?'

Monitoring

Check progress

- Know how the apprentice/trainee is progressing in all areas of training
- Set a regular meeting time with the apprentice/trainee
- Develop and use a Training Plan outlining the what, where and when of training – remember it is a flexible document – you can change it with the involvement of the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and apprentice/trainee
- Ensure the apprentice/trainee's workbook is signed off.

Give feedback

Feedback is important because it:

- Allows the apprentice/trainee to measure their progress
- Encourages and builds confidence
- Targets areas to focus on to improve skills:
'Now I'd like you to concentrate on getting messages down properly. If you don't know how to spell someone's name – ask.'
- Allows you to openly discuss progress and concerns:
'That's great Sarah, you're getting really good on the phone now.'

Seek feedback

- Find out what areas they need extra help with or may be worried about:
'You don't seem nearly so nervous when you're answering the phone Sarah. How are you feeling about it now?'
- Wait for answers – don't be afraid of silence
- Be positive, help them find their own solutions.

Ask the right questions

Ask open questions (who, why, what, when, where, how), to encourage feedback:

'How are your classes going? What are you doing next?'

Yes/No questions don't get much information:

'Do you like your classes?'...

Motivate

Provide variety

Apprentices/trainees often spend the majority of their time doing routine jobs. Variety allows the apprentice/trainee to build confidence in their ability as well as make training more interesting.

Variety could include:

- New and different tasks
- Opportunities to apply new skills in different work environments – such as alternative work sites, other departments or sections of the business
- Visits to trade shows or contact with clients or customers.

Give recognition

You could try these:

- Make an announcement at work about their achievements
- Give them a mention in the company newsletter or on the noticeboard
- Organise a ticket to a trade show
- Arrange for them to attend a management meeting or a sales meeting
- Nominate the apprentice/trainee for an industry training award – check with your registered training organisation or New Apprenticeships Centre.

Solutions to problems

Most apprentice/trainees experience problems at some stage during training. These problems can be with the job itself, the training or perhaps more personal issues. If workplace performance is affected, perhaps the apprentice/trainee is:

- Nervous about how well they are going
- Uncomfortable with some of the other staff
- Under stress – too much on their plate at once, or behind in some aspect of their training
- Having personal and/or home difficulties
- Having problems with reading, writing or maths requirements of the job or the training.

Towards a solution

When an issue arises, you can help the apprentice/trainee work through it.

Follow these steps:

- Have a positive attitude
- Put the trainee's needs into perspective
- Look for a win/win situation
- Negotiate, encourage and advise:
'Okay Joe, you'll still have to do the cleaning up. But when you've finished I've arranged for you to spend an hour in the accounts department to see how the invoicing works. And next time a pricing job comes in you can assist me with it.'

Reading, writing and maths

When working with the apprentice/trainee think about:

- What level of reading, writing and maths does the trainee need to effectively carry out the job
- How you communicate with the apprentice/trainee
- What skills do you expect of them when coaching and giving instructions
- Whether the instructions are more complex than the job
- Whether you have realistic expectations

Tips

- Provide examples of documents you use in the workplace – a completed order form, letters
- Provide opportunities to copy – lists or order numbers frequently used
- Allow plenty of time to practise tasks until they become familiar
- Give instructions in sequence

Remember:

'First check the address, then fill out the order.'

- Avoid mixing up the sequence when you give the instruction. Don't say: *'Before you fill the order out make sure you've checked the address.'*
- When you've given a complex set of instructions, ask the trainee to repeat them – remember to keep it supportive: *'Okay then, what do you do first? And then?'*
- Give positive feedback even for small steps: *'Okay, that sounds like you've got the hang of it.'*
- Discuss how the RTO can help you with reading, writing and maths assistance for the apprentice/trainee
- Encourage the apprentice/trainee to ask questions when they don't understand

Training talk

Workplace supervisor

A training manager who will ensure the apprentice/trainee is provided with the opportunities to master the skills and competencies required for their job and training program.

Workplace coach

Person chosen to coach, teach, train, mentor, monitor and guide the apprentice/trainee. In some workplaces the workplace supervisor and workplace coach are the same person.

Assessor

The person(s) responsible for assessment who will determine whether your apprentice/trainee is competent. This person(s) must be qualified. Assessment is organised by the RTO.

On the job training

Instruction, practice and feedback conducted in the workplace.

Off the job training

Conducted away from the worksite, at an RTO, in a classroom at your worksite or outside your organisation

Training Plan

A document that details the training to be conducted, the method and location. Negotiated between you, the training organisation and the apprentice/trainee

Training Package

A national resource that consists of both compulsory and elective competencies that makes up national qualifications. Training Packages also include guidelines for assessment and may also include assessment materials and learning strategies.

Unit of competency

National industry approved standards that outline the knowledge and skills necessary for effective performance in the workplace.

Workplace assessment

Collecting evidence and determining if the apprentice/trainee is competent in an industry environment.

Recognition of current competency

The process of formally recognising current skills, knowledge and competencies already acquired through either formal or informal learning.

Source: National Retail Association