"A fluid, fun, and insanely useful conversation for all hiring managers, HR professionals, and trainers."
Lisa Haneberg, author of 12 business books, including Coaching Up and Down the Generations

90 DAYS
90 WAYS

Onboard Young Professionals to Peak Performance

ALEXIA VERNON
“For, he that expects nothing shall not be disappointed, but he that expects much—if he lives and uses that in hand day by day—shall be full to running over.”

Edgar Cayce

If I had a dollar to invest for every time a manager has told me, “I hated to do it, but I had to let __________ go” or “I had to put __________ on probation,” I’d have one robust Roth IRA by now. While I’ve elicited more than a few scowls by replying
to such statements with a somewhat bemused, “What was your role in that failure?,”
the question has always been genuine. In our companies—as well as our schools and
our families—there is an epidemic of viewing underperformance or shattered expectations
as the fault of one person. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. It takes two hardworking
partners to build a successful marriage, a tribe to raise and educate a child, and an
active partnership between a company’s HR department, learning and development arm,
and a young professional’s direct supervisor to get that young professional successfully to
the end of her first 90 days. Once we understand that we are as responsible for the success
of a new hire as the new hire herself, then and only then can we learn, apply, and refine
the key strategies for ensuring our young professionals get to where they need to be.

If you want greatness from your young professionals—and surely you do or
you wouldn’t be reading this book—you want to inspire it from day one. You do this
by communicating clearly what greatness looks like when it’s in full bloom, and you
ensure that your new hires understand your definition. You plant the seed for greatness
by speaking about your company/department/team as an incubator for the best and
brightest people, ideas, and projects. And most importantly, you observe how your young
professionals are growing and you shift your strategy based on what you observe—and
what they tell you—they need.

In one of my favorite books on collaborative leadership, *As One*, authors Mehrdad
Baghai and James Quigley use the relationship between a senator and citizens—as
conceived and played out by the Ancient Romans—as an archetype to describe a way
for leaders to elicit the best from their employees. According to Baghai and Quigley,
“Citizens are filled with the notion of freedom and pride in their work. Their behaviors
are guided by the constitution and by their strong sense of belonging, thus they work hard to ensure that the community and what it represents are preserved. Equally important, senators help create an environment where citizens can make autonomous decisions. No one tells them what choices to make; they understand how their decisions impact the overall success of the community.”

This is an effective way to think about how to engender success from young new hires. Our newest generation of workplace professionals grew up in a self-help culture that has suggested they are entitled to and have a responsibility to derive meaning from their professional work. As we have explored, our new young professionals have been working collaboratively from the time they were in preschool and are used to thinking about what best serves the needs and desires of a group. While this generation has been stereotyped as coddled, its members are used to having a voice in the decisions that affect them and the rest of their team or “community.” As companies, when we can follow Baghai and Quigley’s charge to provide a “constitution” with principles and values for which young professionals can operate and measure their success by, then we can “step back and allow the citizens to come to decisions on their own.”

Return-on-Investment (ROI) Vs. Return-on-Expectations (ROE)

When we measure ROI, we are looking to measure the success of the “investment” (the money, time, and energy) we have made in an employee’s learning and growth. While plenty of metrics exist to capture how effective onboarding drives business results by reducing turnover, inefficiency, mistakes, and so forth—I believe that attempting to
measure your ROE, particularly around onboarding, is a more effective means for assessing success and strengthening your practices. What do you expect employees to be able “to do” by the end of their 90 days? Make 40 sales calls per day? Receive good to excellent ratings on “smiley sheets” after each of their weekly presentations? When you are able to answer how success will be achieved for your young professionals—and ultimately for yourself—you will be able to develop an onboarding action plan that gets your expectations met. You will also ensure that HR, training, and management are all cogs that are part of the same wheel: new hire success.

**BE TRANSPARENT**

Transparency is one of the key catalysts for sustainable workplace success. As we explored in chapter 3, this generation of young professionals thrives with a syllabus. They like to know what they are responsible for (chief responsibilities and accountabilities), when key assignments are due (project deadlines), and how grades will be determined (means for assessment).

Transparency makes a great workplace core value. And companies with honest and accessible customer and employee reviews, pay scales, and promotion pathways consistently report higher profitability, employee engagement, and retention. Transparency is equally important when it comes to employee expectations, particularly for young new hires. Let your new hires know what you expect, and make yourself a partner in helping them get there.

While HR and training want to set their expectations during their first touch with a new hire, if you are a manager or direct supervisor, your initial conversation about your
expectations for your young professional should happen by the end of the first week. During this conversation, you want to clarify exactly what you expect from your new hire in each of the following P’s. Questions to ask yourself in order to help you identify the exact pieces you want to convey include:

**Professionalism**

(Note: Some of these you may have addressed prior to the first day. However, it’s not a bad idea to revisit them again.)

- What is appropriate workplace dress?
- What is the appropriate use of technology, particularly social media?
- Can employees take personal calls in the workplace?
- What kind of relationship can young professionals enjoy with managers outside of the workplace?
- Can colleagues date? If so, must they be in different departments? Have lateral positions? Report the romance to HR?

**Performance**

- What are the three to five key indicators of outstanding performance in this position?
- What skills and behaviors do you want to see evidence of?
- What are key benchmarks in performance that must be met in the first 90 days?
• What are key project deadlines that must be hit in the first 90 days?
• How are promotions and raises decided?

Problem Solving
• What are proven best practices for handling the “typical” problems that someone in this role will encounter?
• How should a young professional navigate a problem? At what point should a supervisor be brought in?
• What are company practices for handling internal conflict or conflict with a customer/stakeholder should it emerge?

Passion
• What’s an appropriate workplace attitude?
• What values do successful employees carry into their work?
• How can young professionals demonstrate creativity and innovation?
• How can new hires best incorporate themselves within (while actively shaping) company culture?

The way you frame conversations about expectations is just as important as communicating what you expect. By asking yourself the questions above, you will
undoubtedly hit upon company and individual policies and procedures for which there is no wiggle room. At Doug’s Doodads we have a zero-tolerance policy for violence in the workplace. We define violence as the physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse of an employee, customer, or stakeholder. Fair enough. Yet I suspect your company (and particularly you) have a lot of “soft” expectations, particularly in the areas of attitude, engagement, problem solving, and innovation for which there are not clear guidelines or means for assessment. These areas—what I like to call the “connective tissue”—will determine whether your young professionals will have the muscle, strength, and endurance to stay running (for while 90 days will get them ready for the race, ultimately it’s a marathon and not a sprint). As we will next explore, if we want a champion athlete or star performer, we need the person in question to be a pivotal part of designing the action plan.

**CO-CREATE MEANS FOR ASSESSMENT**

In conjunction with articulating your expectations in as much detail as possible, you want to discuss how you will measure achievement in each of the four Ps. To obtain buy-in to your expectations and create the foundation necessary for a young professional not only to meet but also to exceed expectations, solicit their ideas for how success will be measured. To return to our previous metaphor, get clear on what your young professional or “athlete” needs to stay hydrated, flexible, strong, and fast.

Some key questions to ask are:

- How can I best support you in achieving __________?
• What is the balance between structure and freedom you need to consistently give your best?

• How are you best able to listen to and incorporate feedback?

• What kind of formal and informal assessment has previously worked well for you?

• What are the things I should avoid doing at all costs that you know shut you down and impede success?

Strive to show up to conversations with the sole agenda of co-creating a viable, results-oriented plan and follow-up strategy. Ensure that you are asking questions that facilitate insight for your employees, particularly young new hires who thrive in such a learner-centered environment. By doing so, your job becomes easier and your employees will achieve greater success—for they will have taken ownership over their own learning.

FIND YOUR EMPLOYEE’S MOTIVATORS

In one of my favorite books on motivation, Drive, author Daniel Pink differentiates between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators and provides numerous recommendations for how leaders, managers, and companies can and should shift from the former to the latter. He suggests that if the overall work that your young professional new hire is engaging in is in any way stimulating, creative, and requires autonomy, consistently relying on carrots to drive performance and results ultimately yields one of these “Seven Deadly Flaws”:

• They can extinguish intrinsic motivation.
• They can diminish performance.

• They can crush creativity.

• They can crowd out good behavior.

• They can encourage cheating, shortcuts, and unethical behavior.

• They can become addictive.

• They can foster short-term thinking.

To understand how to hook into intrinsic motivators to catalyze an employee’s drive, it’s important to again reference Pink and draw an important distinction between motivation and inspiration.

**Motivation Vs. Inspiration**

Motivation is the individual force within a person that makes her want to show up to life at 100 percent to perform at 100 percent. Inspiration, on the other hand, is what draws out a person’s motivation. As managers, trainers, coaches, or consultants, we cannot motivate someone. Something is either a motivator for someone or it is not. What we can do is identify what specifically motivates each of our employees and step into the role of inspirer by enabling our people to harness their motivators in their work.

While as you know I’m not a big fan of stereotypes, I do think it’s important to understand what members of each generation typically value most, so that we as workplace managers and leaders can harness this enthusiasm to produce the results we seek. As I’ve
shared with you previously, our current generation of young professionals particularly values work where they feel like they are making a positive social and environmental impact, the ability to learn and grow in their workplaces, and the ability to achieve integration between work and life. They also like to be acknowledged in front of others for exemplary work. In other words, it’s not the trophy. It’s the ceremony where they receive the trophy that matters!

Therefore, consider how to inspire your young professionals via peer recognition. Sodexo is one company that has figured out how to do this well. Sodexo’s brand ambassadors participate in the Brand Ambassador of the Month (BAM!) program. While the person who has done the best job promoting Sodexo in their online communities is simply recognized on the team call, Senior Director of Talent Acquisition, Sherie Valderrama, says that peer recognition does an incredibly powerful job of tapping her staff’s desire to be honored. “When we announce the winner on a team call,” Sherie explains, “that person doesn’t just receive congratulations on the phone. It’s not uncommon for 40 tweets to go out from the Sodexo community in a matter of minutes acknowledging the person. That goes a long way with our people.”

Remember too that motivators will also be shaped by the industry you are in. For example, in the leadership and career development program I lead for new nurses, approximately 80 percent of each cohort I work with—irrespective of hospital or specialization—report that feeling competent is one of their biggest motivators to staying engaged in their work. When I have worked with other groups of young professionals, such as MBA students or new business associates, one of the motivators I typically encounter is the ability to create solutions for problems people have previously put up with.
There is no surefire recipe for sourcing your young professionals’ motivators. You can have them do one of the many motivation styles assessments that exist. You can have them identify the times in their life they have been most motivated by the academic, philanthropic, or professional work they were doing and have them explore common themes that were present. And most importantly—and most simply—you can ask. *What gets you most jazzed? What can I do to help you harness your motivation in the work that you do?* Or if you suspect there is some barrier getting in the way—particularly as you creep into your second or third month of work together, a time when the initial walking on egg shells to impress and people please stops—*What barriers are getting in the way of you feeling motivated? How can we partner together to remove them?* Then, make sure you are applying this information in how you are assigning work to your young professionals: checking in and holding them accountable; acknowledging them when they have been successful; troubleshooting with them when they get stuck; and pushing them to the next level of success when they are ready for a new challenge. Not sure how to solve all of those potential challenges? This question does have an answer. And it’s coaching.

**CREATE A COACHING CULTURE**

As we have explored so far in the onboarding tactics in this chapter, whether you are looking to create a system for assessment or learning how to identify your young professional’s motivators, the key to having conversations that lead to results is to coach. While I’m a bit uncomfortable privileging one onboarding tactic over another, if you were to play with only one of our 90, this would without a doubt be the tactic I’d want you to use. For when new hires are open to being coached and can apply it, together there really is no problem that cannot be bulldozed through.
While there are as many different definitions of coaching and approaches to doing it as there are people who profess to coach, we’re going to explore what I have found to be the most simple way to conceptualize coaching. Then, we will look at how to do it as effortlessly, efficiently, and consistently as possible with your new young professionals.

Coaching is a confidential, empowering, and catalytic relationship between a coach and coachee(s) to facilitate learning and growth, improve performance, and close the gap from where coachee(s) are to where they aspire to be.

When someone steps into the role of coach, she begins by establishing that the conversation is confidential and then seeks to learn as much as possible about where the person receiving the coaching is coming from. To be successful as a coach, whether coaching a young professional or a senior leader, one must let go of an agenda for the person receiving coaching, use curiosity to ask questions that promote critical thinking and insight, listen to what is being said (and not said), and adapt her approach to best fit the needs of who is being coached. Coaching conversations are often scheduled to allow the person receiving coaching to show up as prepared as possible, yet they can be impromptu as long as both parties are game. Because young professionals tend to be adaptable, multitasking, and comfortable with real-time feedback due to their immersion in online media, they are the generation perhaps most amenable to impromptu coaching.

For coaching to yield results, the coach must enable the person receiving coaching to define the focus of the conversation as early as possible. This is pivotal, particularly for young professionals who may not be familiar with coaching. For those new to receiving coaching, it can be tricky to identify what the goal is and it can be easy to get wrapped
up in story. For example, while your new hire might need to vent for a few minutes about her overwhelming feelings, you both will have a more productive conversation if she can identify that she would like to walk away with a couple of strategies to improve time management. Other times the focus will be somewhat ephemeral—getting comfortable in one’s new role. When the coachee identifies a focus without clear means for assessing whether the goal has been met, a coach wants to unpick the aim. How will you know when you are comfortable? What will being comfortable look and feel like to you? What will be the payoff?

Once an agenda is created, the coach asks questions to help coachee(s) tap into their own wisdom and find the answers to get them where they want to go. You should resist the temptation to take answers at face value, knowing that people often see symptoms of problems rather than their sources. Therefore, your questions should push coachees beyond their own assumptions and help them explore possibilities they may have never previously considered. Just as importantly, you help people see themselves as creators of their own experiences. Even when people don’t like the choices before them, a choice always exists—even if it’s simply about how to process and archive an experience. Here are some effective questions for your coaching toolbox:

**Getting Unstuck**

- If you knew the answer, how would it begin?
- What are you pretending not to know?
- How can you remove the pressure of getting “the right” answer so that you are open to recognizing your answer?
• How can I support you in brainstorming some possibilities?

• What would choosing the path of least resistance look like?

**Empowering**

• Where have you been successful?

• What’s your role in this?

• Who are you called to *be* in this situation?

• How might this be an opportunity for you to play “a bigger game”?

• Who will you be as a result of this achievement?

**Thinking About Your Own Thinking**

• How long have you been thinking about this?

• If you were to look at __________ as a symptom of something deeper, what could be its source?

• If __________ keeps showing up, what does this suggest about what you are putting out into the world?

• How can you shift this obstacle into an opportunity?

• What’s the lesson you are ready to learn, once and for all?
During a coaching conversation—which usually lasts 20–45 minutes—you dance between asking questions, mirroring back what you are picking up, and devising action. As a coach you are never telling someone else what to do. You may share best practices you have seen work, or offer up your own ideas when brainstorming. For learning to stick and facilitate shifts in thinking, behavior, and results, coachees need to settle on their own answers and articulate what they will do with the content of the conversation.

Therefore, it’s incredibly important as a coach to bring a coaching conversation to a close by allowing the person receiving coaching to share back what has been most useful from the conversation and how she will apply it moving forward. As we will explore in more detail in our next tactic on feedback, you also want to be clear on follow-up, assessment, and how you can support the achievement of results. This can all be accomplished in a few simple questions. *Tell me, what are you taking away from our conversation? What has been most useful for you about what we’ve explored?* Once the person has sufficiently answered, then you can follow up with a question or two about next steps. *How will you transfer what you are taking away into action? How can I support you in meeting these objectives?* Let’s take a look at how to apply these coaching principles in real world practice.

In the following scenario, “Nurse Nancy” is finishing her fourth week as a new nurse on the medical-surgical floor of an urban hospital. Like most recent graduates, Nancy is being paired with a preceptor—a veteran nurse who is sharing her patient load with Nancy and helping her learn everything she needs to know about her role, before flying solo at the end of her first six to eight weeks on the job. For those unfamiliar with current nursing culture, a new nurse grad can expect to work three to four 12-hour shifts per week, carry a patient load of initially two, and eventually up to six patients. And on a med-surg
floor where most new nurses land, they will spend the majority of a shift on their feet, running between patient rooms, making phone calls to doctors, consulting with families, and learning new technology and charting systems. Many of these new nurses don’t get a break. Many also rotate between day, night, and graveyard shifts, meaning they may not be able to sleep between shifts and are showing up to work tired.

In the role play we’re going to explore, Nancy’s preceptor, Paula, has noticed that Nancy is no longer the bright-eyed, overeager, perfectionist nurse she was paired with a month earlier. She’s not sure what is going on with Nancy, but she is worried about her—and of course how her changes in attitude and energy might be shifting her behavior. Already she’s noticed that one of her charts had too much explanation (nurses are asked to chart by exception) and that some of her words were unclearly abbreviated. Let’s see how Paula, a skilled coach, is able to help her new hire unpick what has been going on and explore ways to move from grad to great—following the best coaching practices we detailed in the previous pages.

**Preceptor Paula Coaches Nurse Nancy**

**Paula:** Nancy, thank you so much for taking a moment to chat with me. Is this still a good time? [1]

**Nancy:** Absolutely. It feels really good to get off my feet.

**Paula:** Yes, I think it’s fair to say we’re both pretty exhausted. Tell me. How has your day been going?

**Nancy:** All right, I guess.

**Paula:** What have been your high points of the shift? [2]
Nancy: I feel like I’ve been doing a good job balancing my time between patients.

Paula: I agree. Your time management skills have definitely grown in the last few days. (3) What strategies have enabled you to do this? (4)

Nancy: Taking a few minutes at the start of my shift to map out what I need to get done and the best order to do it all in. Also, dividing tasks into short-term urgent, long-term urgent, short-term non-urgent, and long-term non-urgent has really helped. I used to never get to any long-term non-urgent, and now I make sure I slip these in once I’ve gotten the short-term urgent tasks taken care of.

Paula: This is terrific, Nancy. I’m really impressed. (5)

Nancy: That means a lot. Sometimes I feel like I’m not really working at my best. I have a tendency to repeat in my head everything I’ve done wrong and never remember anything I did that was right.

Paula: I’m not sure I know what you mean. I see a lot of potential in you. Could you tell me a little bit more about that? (6)

Nancy: I’ve just been second-guessing myself a lot lately. That’s actually why I’ve been wanting to talk to you. I’m sure you’ve noticed. I don’t feel like I’m the same person I showed up as a few weeks back. I don’t know how to get back to my old self, and I really want to.

Paula: Is that what you’d like to walk away with today? A plan for getting back to your “old self?” (7)

Nancy: That would be amazing if that could happen. Yes.
Paula: When you think about your “old self,” who do you see? [8]

Nancy: That’s a good question. I guess it’s less about seeing. I mean sure, I had a smile on my face. I couldn’t wait to get to work. But more than anything, I just felt like I was prepared for this experience. I wasn’t in this alone.

Paula: What has gotten in the way of you feeling like you have a team to turn to when you are unsure of an answer or need some verification? [9]

Nancy: I guess it happened after Sarah [the charge nurse on the floor] heard me reading an incorrect dose to a doctor on the phone. She pulled the phone out of my hand, told the doctor I had made a mistake, and since then I’ve just felt like I was walking on eggshells around her. Kind of around everyone. I haven’t wanted to ask for help. I keep making mistakes. And a lot of days I just feel like I’m an idiot. And it’s becoming somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Now, I’m getting sloppy with my own charts. I know better than that. I just can’t shake the feeling that I disappointed Sarah. And now, everyone else.

Paula: I can tell that thinking you’ve let someone else down is really hard for you. How might forgiving yourself start a chain reaction of positive results in this situation? [10]

Nancy: It would be huge. I would be able to get out of my head, stay in the moment, stop making such careless mistakes, and just feel better overall. I’d also probably be able to sleep better when I finally make it to bed.

Paula: How will you make this commitment to yourself—once and for all? [11]
Nancy: When I hear my inner critic pop up, I’m going to remind myself that I am a smart and capable nurse. I literally just need to repeat that to myself again and again until that message sticks. And I can ask myself, “What did I do right today?” The more I put my attention to that, the more I will keep doing things more and more right.

Paula: How can you apply what you have learned with Sarah moving forward? (12)

Nancy: Oh my goodness, not be embarrassed to ask for another set of eyes to read over something if I’m at all unsure. I will ask for help when I need it. And if I do make a mistake, I’m going to own it in the moment and not let myself wilt. You know, until we started talking about this I don’t think I even realized how this one incident has seriously undermined me almost every day for the last few weeks. I realize now that if I could have just said, “Sarah, I’m sorry for misreading the number. Thank you for having my back,” I would have felt like I stepped into my power rather than away from it. And I think that’s the key to me feeling competent. Standing tall in difficult situations rather than shrinking from them.

Paula: You are a powerful person, Nancy. When you believe that, your enthusiasm and ability to make a difference are infectious. We’re here for you. You just have to let us know how we can help. Now, I know we need to get back out on the floor, so let’s start to bring everything we’ve talked about together. What has been of most value to you during our conversation today? (13)

Nancy: Having the space to talk this all out. Like I said, I knew that I wasn’t
myself but I really wasn’t sure why. Recognizing that the way I store an experience is as important as the experience itself is a really big “aha” for me. Also, learning how to stop myself in the midst of a negative thought pattern. And of course, making the commitment to reach out to my team. You all are here for me.

Paula: How can I best support you in applying what you learned today? (14)

Nancy: When we have our check-ins, it would be really great if you could just ask me how my inner critic is doing. Also, I’m going to pay attention to my charting. Make sure that when I’m doing it, I’m really focused on my writing. No more abbreviations or unnecessary explanations. If you could look at my next few and tell me how they look, that would be really useful.

Paula: You got it, Nancy. I can’t wait to see how you continue to evolve in our next few weeks together. I think your future is very bright. (15)

The Core Pieces of the Coaching Conversation

(1) Asking for permission
(2) Asking a possibility-centered question to empower
(3) Mirroring back success
(4) Facilitating learning and growth
(5) More affirmation
(6) Asking for clarification
(7) Setting agenda
(8) Facilitating learning and growth
(9) Listening to what is not being said
(10) Facilitating learning and growth; moving to action
(11) Facilitating learning and growth; moving to action
(12) Facilitating learning and growth; moving to action
(13) Recapping
(14) Next Steps
(15) Empowering

DO IT EARLY...AND OFTEN

No, believe it or not I’m not talking about voting. I’m talking about feedback. Unless you are the head of the Institute of Psychic Arts and your new hires are all recent grads from your academic program, they need to know how they are performing beyond semiannual or quarterly reviews, and certainly before their first 90 days are up. After all, if it takes 90–120 days to create a new habit, you want to reinforce productive behaviors and curb the not-so-productive ones as early as possible.

In a recent whitepaper, “The Future of Millennial Careers,” Millennial business and workplace expert Alexandra Levit reports: “51 percent of managers believe Millennials exhibit an inability to accept criticism from their managers” and “54 percent of Millennials are in agreement.” In order to break through this potential barrier to young professional new hire success, you want to be able to have your new hires identify their own gaps in
thinking or performance through the kind of coaching conversation we explored between Preceptor Paula and Nurse Nancy. These kinds of questions enable you to set your new hire up to engage in the thinking, self-reflection, and action planning necessary to meet and hopefully exceed your expectations. When your new hires can identify their own blind spots and areas for improvement, they are far more likely to self-correct and take your direct feedback when you do offer it.

Sometimes, even when you approach feedback from a coaching perspective, you don't get to the place you intended. Let's assume you have let go of the assumption that what you have been witnessing with your new hire is the source of the problem rather than the symptom. You created a safe space for exploration. You empowered your young professional. And she just isn’t getting it. Or lacks the knowledge or skill necessary to create a new habit in thinking or behavior. You need to deliver some feedback.

As I hope you would with any of your other employees, make sure you set a time to talk that is mutually agreed upon. If you want them to be in a space where they can let down their guard, truly listen to what you have to say, and take action from it, then they need to consent to having the talk and engage in it at a time when and where they can be fully present.

The most important thing you can do for your young professional is to stay in the coach zone. Even if questions like How would you evaluate your performance over the last week? elicit a blank stare—or even worse, unwarranted self-praising—resist the temptation to go into telling mode. Keep your recommendations rooted in specifics and behaviors. Keep the emotion out of it.
If Nurse Nancy in our previous coaching conversation had never brought up her sloppy charting or had not had the problem with her charge nurse and simply was underperforming, you can use an observation as an entry point into your feedback. *I've noticed that you are no longer charting by exception and that there have been some mistakes in your documentation.* Stick to the facts. Give the statement a moment to land and sink in. Then, follow up with a question in the way that a young professional can best hear it. If you have a casual relationship, perhaps it’s, *So tell me, Nancy, what’s been going on?* Listen to what Nancy has to say, and articulate as clearly as possible the behavior you need her to exhibit and its significance—in whatever order makes the most sense. *Nancy, as I know you know, charting is vital for keeping a patient’s entire team on the same page and for ensuring patient safety. Moving forward, can I count on you to spell each word out—no more abbreviations—and to repeat back to a doctor anything you are hearing on the phone before writing it down?* To which, if Nancy wants to keep her job—I kid, somewhat—she will surely say, “yes.” You are now on the same page. The behavioral change is clear and actionable.

In addition to having timely conversations, asking for permission, being specific, and keeping the focus on the behavior you want to solidify (or reshape), you also want to keep your feedback the right kind of personal. Also, ensure that there’s a follow-up plan attached to it. For example, if you know that a young new hire is working on weeding out the kind of vocalized thinking we discussed in the previous chapter, rather than bombard her with feedback on every realm of her face-to-face communication, give her a suggestion such as “stop-and-smile.” Explain how to apply it to eliminate her favorite filler phrase, “so you know.” Then, after you devise a strategy for the behavioral modification, co-create the plan for follow-up. Again, if possible, elicit your young professional in the solution. *I
love that you want to get comfortable with stop-and-smile. How will you practice it in the next two weeks before we have a conversation check-in?

Action planning is vital. If you feel like you are receiving a wishy-washy response, clarify further. *I appreciate that you are going to use stop-and-smile in workplace conversations. Let’s distill that down further so that we are both clear how that looks in action. I’m giving you the challenge to practice stop-and-smile with each member of our sales team in the next 14 days. That way you are using it with people who are familiar with the exercise and who can support you by giving you reminders if you should lapse back into the “so you knows.”*

And most importantly, if you want to facilitate follow-through, link action items to what your young professionals care about. Suzy Rogers, an HR manager for Rockwell Automation, does this well. One technique she uses is to craft analogies that speak directly to the interests of her young staff. If she’s seeking to reinforce the importance of flexing communication style to meet people where they’re at, she might say, “Now imagine that you just purchased your first house. You have a favorite room that you’ve done up just the way you like, but sometimes you want to go into the other rooms. Now, while you may have a communication style that you go to the most, what can you do to meet people who might be on the other side of the house?”

Suzy also links the feedback she gives to her employees’ individual motivators. She describes one young employee as “a goddess of systems”—a real content expert—but in need of developing her ability to coach other staff after being promoted to a new managerial role. Suzy would give her hypothetical scenarios and ask her how she would coach the person in it. Because this young professional was motivated by being perceived
as “awesome” in her work, Suzy would recognize her for doing “a good job” in the role plays. And then, she'd push further. “Now, what would it take for you not just to be good, but to be a master? And how can you apply this to next week’s scenario?” As Suzy explains, this language really excited her young professional. It also got her to step up her game, and she usually figured out how to do it herself.

**BE OPEN TO COACHING**

**Coachability.** The degree that we are open to what the environment can offer or the extent to which we accept and consider input and ideas (Lisa Haneberg, *Coaching Up and Down the Generations*).

To support your young professional in moving efficiently and effectively from new hire to peak performer, make sure that you are willing to step into the role of a coachee and not just the role of a coach. If you follow the recommendations we have played with in the previous pages, you will have successfully modeled how to coach and created the space for your young professionals to give *you* feedback. While you may recognize that this is “good practice,” if you are used to a more traditional hierarchal relationship with your employees—particularly those that are new and young—this is going to feel uncomfortable at first. Stick with it.

Remember that your young professionals are part of the first generation that was given permission to provide feedback to their educators and their parents. When they feel like they are builders of their own experiences and not simply passive participants in it, they will know they are in familiar territory. They also will more quickly and creatively
move beyond real and self-imposed limitations. They will be able to recognize and ultimately—through self-correction—avoid hiccups in their thinking and behavior. And perhaps most importantly, they will make your job infinitely easier by clarifying how you can help them get to where you both want them to be.

Once you get comfortable dancing between the role of coach and coachee, you will notice that your enjoyment of your own role increases. As Lisa Haneberg describes, when you allow yourself to be coached, “You feel a sense of confidence. You are relaxed and feel a professional affection for the other person; after all, she is giving you the gift of time and feedback. And when the feedback is really helpful, you feel a rush of excitement and enthusiasm.” Being coachable allows you to move beyond the minutia of a particular situation or mistake and to focus on solutions for moving forward. It allows the person with titular authority to let go of the need to have all of the right answers, and to instead trust that in dialogue you and the other person or people engaged in the coaching conversation hold collective responsibility for future action.

While you can let your new young professionals know that they have permission to give you coaching when you first introduce the practice to them, reinforce your openness after their first month. It will take approximately 30 days for them to know what they need more of, less of, and what is working just right. The more you embrace the key components of creating a coaching culture, the more you will undoubtedly slip back and forth between a coach and a coachee in the course of a conversation.

MAKE MISTAKES TEACHABLE MOMENTS

“Teachable Moments” are one of the quickest ways to create a learning organization, helping the entire team to learn from the many mistakes on
the journey to excellence. The attitude of learning organizations is, if we are going to make mistakes anyway, let’s go ahead and learn from them.”

Orrin Woodward

You’re in the business of facilitating learning and growth if you want employees to perform well, stay engaged, become self-directed, and move to their next level of success. As a generation, our newest young professionals have not been encouraged to take risks. With an increasing emphasis on standardized tests and grade point averages, many young people have been socialized to play it safe and get to “the right answer” as quickly as possible. While I don’t believe in regrets, I’m disappointed that I’ve been such a person. I opted out of several AP classes my last years of high school for fear that I may not receive an A, and as a consequence lower my GPA and not be as competitive for the colleges and scholarships I was applying for. I hope you’ll agree with me that you’d rather have a new hire who doesn’t get an “A” than a new hire who sets a glass ceiling for her insight and achievement.

Without you creating and modeling a culture where it’s okay to take calculated risks and sometimes not deliver on them, your new hires might be good in their roles but they will never be great. In order to institutionalize teachable moments into your new hire’s first 90 days—and beyond—begin by asking coaching questions to see if your young professional can identify her mistake on her own. Karen, I just had a chance to review your first financial report. How do you feel like you did? If the mistake is either something your young professional wouldn’t recognize—for example, not having the amount of funds in her till to match the total transactions you see logged—you may need to begin by identifying the mistake yourself. Lou, you came up $100 short today. I’d like to talk about what happened. Then, staying in a coaching frame of mind, identify specifically with your
new hire what can be learned from the mistake and how to focus on a lasting solution. If this mistake has happened before, make sure to point this out and tell them you want to know how you can help ensure the mistake is no longer repeated. If your new hire shares that it’s a lack of knowledge, fill in the gaps. If it’s a breakdown in communication, go back to the strategies you have outlined about communication to speak with rather than at each other moving forward.

Sandwich disappointment over mistakes and broken expectations with positive affirmations rooted in what your new hire is doing well and why she is a valuable member of your team. Ensure that you end such conversations by having her share back what she has learned, how she will tangibly apply this learning moving forward, and what she needs from you to ensure that this is a lesson she never needs to learn again. This ensures that you are truly creating a teachable moment.

**UPHOLD CONSEQUENCES**

Just as it’s important to bring your new hires into the conversation about how they can best meet your expectations, it’s important to hold them accountable when they do not. Letting an employee whose skill set, work ethic, or personality is mismatched between role, team, or culture continue on benefits nobody—not you, not that employee, and certainly not the rest of your department or company. If you have been engaged in ongoing coaching and feedback conversations and little to no improvement has been made, the employee you have neglected to hold accountable—as well as future new hires and members of your existing team—will see you as all talk and no action. Knowing that you do not walk your talk, they will begin to push boundaries because they can get away
with it. Identify the source of why your new hire is not a fit, and make an appropriate decision for how to take action.

For many employees, a hiccup on the path to success is just that. A hiccup. As discussed in our last tactic, call it out early and set an aggressive plan to fix it. Remember that the first 90 days are meant to be a probationary period. Just like in the criminal justice system, if somebody violates a rule or fails to deliver on a responsibility, your authority and future success necessitates that you implement the consequences—which you hopefully identified and ideally co-created with your new hire as discussed at the start of the chapter.

Here are four common root causes for why effective onboarding may not have created an effective employee, as well as my recommendations for how to address each before the culmination of the first 90 days:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New hire lacks skills to be successful in the current role.</td>
<td>Provide necessary training and coaching to build skills. If this fails and other relevant skills exist, deploy new hire to a different team or department.</td>
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<td>New hire is not adhering to rules or exhibiting appropriate professionalism.</td>
<td>If infractions are minor, place on probation with a detailed, co-created action plan. If problems persist, terminate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>New hire is not in a role where she can play to her strengths.</td>
<td>Identify a different role on the team or in the company for the new hire to fill.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employee is not a fit with company culture.</td>
<td>Terminate.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
REWARD OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE

To return to Daniel Pink and motivating employees, familiar extrinsic motivators or carrots such as money, title, or benefits can on rare occasion be effective. For example, if a role is inherently not motivating, is short-term, or does not require a lot of deep thinking, then offering familiar carrots like “a dinner certificate for two to each member of the sales team that wins the two-week new member drive” can get employees in gear.

Similarly, if you want to offer an initial one-time incentive to employees who successfully make it to the end of their first 90 days—such as an additional personal day—neither Pink nor I will put you in the Hall of Fame for Most De-Motivating supervisor, trainer, or manager. Remember that if you offer a carrot, you want to point out why you are giving this reward. Perhaps you want to honor that coming in on a Saturday to do a direct mail campaign is tedious, mindless work. Note why the work is necessary and how it will positively make an impact (for example, on you, another department, customers’ lives, business results, and so forth).

Use your coaching skills to create awareness and growth for that young professional and to make her increasingly self-directed. How can you identify if your team needs you again at the 25th hour? How can you tap into your value for service to go beyond your written responsibilities to support the department? These types of questions will also protect you from developing young professionals who expect something bright and shiny every time they complete a task. And the more adept you become as a coach, the more you will enable your young professionals to see the reward in simply getting their intrinsic motivations honored. When you ask a successful employee, How does it feel to
have met your sales target with two weeks to spare?, you create the opportunity for her to laud herself for a job well done and to recognize your appreciation of her achievement.

To maximize your ability to get your employees recognized the way that they want to be recognized, ask. I recently coached a manager who works with young professionals—many of whom have just earned a two-year degree or are in school and pursuing their bachelor’s. “My kids,” the manager began. “They just have the worst work ethic. We start them out at $12/hour, we promote them to $15 after their first 90 days, and the minute they get the raise they get super lazy and incredibly chatty with the other representatives. I don’t know what to do.”

When she asked her employees what most motivated them, perhaps not too surprisingly they didn’t say they needed more money or a fancy dinner out, but rather that they wanted to feel like they worked in a more collaborative work environment. My neurons were firing. “How might you incentivize performance by allowing the reps to work together rather than against one another? And if you’re going to offer a reward, how can you make it social rather than purely financial?”

A smile began to perk through the manager’s previously stiff lips. “Well, I guess we could do a weekly meeting check-in with everyone that wouldn’t just be focused on policies and procedures, but instead could function like a roundtable discussion for sharing best practices, challenges, and concerns. And in a month where we as a group meet our target, maybe we could have some kind of social theme for each Friday of the next month—PJ day or dress as your favorite superhero. We could even have a contest where staff members bring in a baby picture from home and each person has to guess who it is from a pile of them.”
You probably will not be surprised to learn that although this manager’s reps still transitioned out of the company after graduation—which for an entry-level job without a pipeline for advancement is to be expected—employees began to cut out the non-work-related conversation, took ownership over their results, reached out to support and empower team members, and nary a month went by without their “Wacky Fridays.” This manager’s subtle shift in how she incentivized performance—from external motivation to a strategy that embraced the group’s desire for teamwork—transformed an entire culture.

**IF IT’S NOT A FIT, LET THEM GO**

You’ve been transparent about your high expectations. You’ve spent the time to build a relationship with your young professional and to elicit feedback on what motivates her to achieve your vision of success. You’ve co-created the means for performance assessment. You’ve used a coaching approach to catalyze performance, followed the best practices set forth for offering actionable feedback, and given your new hire space and permission to share with you how you can best help her. You’ve held your new hire accountable to the goals that were undertaken. You’ve been waiting to reward performance but, quite frankly, there has been little to nothing “outstanding” to reward. You’ve got two choices. You can continue to perpetuate mediocrity. Or you can let your young professional go—on an extended probation, to another department where she is better suited, or, if it’s just not a good fit, out the door.

As we explored in the tactic on upholding consequences, nobody benefits from letting under performance continue. It’s never any fun letting people go when you have
jobs available for them. Yet if you can honestly say to yourself—and to your company—that you are proud of the role you have played in an employee’s onboarding and that you did everything in your power to set her up for success, take a deep breath, make sure that the appropriate people are notified and on board with the decision, and then put your plan into action. Then, get back to the provocative work of setting the rest of your young professionals up for success and, as we will explore in the next chapter, get the rest of your employees “focused on their focus.”

“Never seem more learned than the people you are with. Wear your learning like a pocket watch and keep it hidden. Do not pull it out to count the hours, but give the time when you are asked.”

Lord Chesterfield

As you set out to make the most of your ROE, in addition to facilitating eureka moments for your young professionals, let your young new hires see you take accountability for your mistakes and grow from them. Did you come up with a proposal for a new company product that promptly got denied because you didn’t get all of the key decision makers on board? Did you ever make a client call where you were so eager to close that you misquoted your prices and then had to eat crow afterwards? Show that you have taken risks and experienced some mighty falls. Explain how this has enabled you to improve your performance and evolve as a professional. Reveal coaching and feedback you have received that has catalyzed your performance. When you demonstrate how you have been knocked down and how you have gotten back up again, your new hires will see the payoff for risk taking. You will help squelch their generational risk aversion. They will see you as a partner and guide to playing a bigger game.
Tweet-Sized Takeaways

- Ensure your ROE by communicating each of the 4 Ps: professionalism, performance, problem solving, and passion.
- Solicit your young professional's ideas for how to hold them accountable.
- Inspire young professionals by identifying what motivates them and helping them get these needs met through their work.
- Use coaching to empower young professionals to move from new hire to peak performer.
- When giving feedback, be specific and timely, keep the focus on behaviors, make it the right kind of personal, and have a follow-up plan.
- Be as comfortable in the role of coachee as you are in the role of coach.
- Shift employee obstacles and mistakes into opportunities to learn and grow.
- Remind new hires about the grounds for assessment they have agreed to, and hold them accountable to your co-created vision of achievement.
- Carrots in moderation are okay. Just make sure that they are linked to a narrative that includes intrinsic motivators.
- If you and your company have invested in setting your young professional up to succeed and she hasn’t, let her go at the end of 90 days.
## CONTENTS

**Introduction**

Chapter 1: Young Professional 411

- Why the Focus on 90 Days .......................................................... 18
- Habits to Keep ................................................................................. 19
  - Balancing Multiple “Things” ....................................................... 19
  - Collaboration ................................................................. 19
  - Respect for Difference ......................................................... 20
  - Commitment to Learning ......................................................... 20
  - Recycle-the-Box™ Thinking .................................................... 20
- Habits to Reshape ........................................................................... 21
  - All-Nighters ............................................................................. 21
  - Senioritis ............................................................................... 22
  - The What’s My Grade? Mentality .............................................. 22
  - Success Is About the Individual .............................................. 23
  - The Loudest One Wins ............................................................... 23

Chapter 2: Create a Knockout Day One

- Begin Day One Prior to Day One .................................................. 32
- Orient Around an Engaging Task for the Day ................................. 34
- Give Time to Customize the Workspace ......................................... 35
- Let Michael Scott Lead Your Office Tour ....................................... 37
Contents

Make Nice With Information Technology (IT) ........................... 38
Set up a Lunch Date ........................................................................ 39
Get to Relationship Building .......................................................... 41
Schedule a Quick Date With HR ..................................................... 41
Address Lingering Anxiety ............................................................... 43
Introduce the Focus for the Week ...................................................... 44
Tweet-Sized Takeaways ............................................................... 47

Chapter 3: Give Them What They Need to Know to Succeed  49
Articulate Role Responsibilities Clearly and Create Accountability .................................................. 50
Share Company Vision, Mission, and Core Values Again and Again ..................................................... 52
Reveal Company and Team Short- and Long-Term Goals ...... 54
Focus Training on What’s Relevant .................................................... 56
Be Proactive and Teach Young Professionals Integral Systems and Procedures ......................................... 57
Explain the Chain of Command ........................................................... 59
Be Transparent About the Promotion Channel .......................... 61
Co-Create a Career Development Plan ............................................. 62
Have Young Professionals Identify Their SWOT ............................................. 64
Provide Relevant Contact Information .............................................. 65
Tweet-Sized Takeaways ............................................................... 67

Chapter 4: Integrate Them Into Your Workplace Culture  69
Hook Young Professionals Into Unique Cultural Features ...... 71
Bring Your Company’s History Off the Web and Into Your Work .......................................................... 73
Listen for What Is Not Being Said ........................................ 179
Ask Questions From a Place of Curiosity ................................. 180
Mirror Back What You Observe .............................................. 183
Make People Feel Validated ................................................... 184
Let Everyone Get What They Need ........................................ 188
Show Them How to “Hold the Beach Ball” .......................... 189
Give Authority to Make Low-Level Decisions ..................... 191
Administer Trial Runs ......................................................... 192
Tweet-Sized Takeaways ....................................................... 195

Chapter 9: Grow Employees Who Create Company Calm 197
Create Employees With a Possibility-Centered Mindset ...... 199
Encourage People to Feel What They’re Feeling... for 90 Seconds ........................................ 200
Develop Proactivity Over Reactivity ......................................... 205
Zap Conflict ........................................................................ 206
Bring in Some Old-Fashioned Forgiveness ....................... 208
Kill Fear Mongering ............................................................ 209
Get Them Organized Their Way .......................................... 211
Be Mindful of the Learning Curve ......................................... 213
Encourage Outside Interests ............................................... 214
Value Privacy and “Off” Time ............................................ 215
Tweet-Sized Takeaways ....................................................... 216

Chapter 10: Inspire Great Performance 219
Be a Mirror for What You Seek ............................................. 220
Let Yourself Learn From Them ............................................ 222
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make Yourself Accessible</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give the Gift of Trust</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push Young Professionals Outside Their Comfort Zones</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let Employees Have Input</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proselytize Mentorship</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest in Their Learning and Development</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Opportunities to Lead</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Tactic</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweet-Sized Takeaways</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterthought</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>