

What types of organizations can use a workforce coach?

The typical profile of an organization that will find value in workforce coaching has some key characteristics: They have a frontline workforce with average wages below \$25/hour; they value their workforce and care about their long-term success; and they are seeing their frontline workforce struggle in various ways. This may manifest itself in turnover, attendance issues, low performance, or subtle signs of disengagement and lack of focus that prevent workers from being their best at work. Many employers position workforce coaching services among their suite of benefit offerings for their employees. While accessible to all employees, workforce coaching is particularly geared toward and utilized by lower-wage employees. Some employers view this service as a way to provide a more inclusive benefit package that has offerings attractive to all levels of employees.

What credentials do workforce coaches have?

Core competencies we look for in our coaches are: customer service, relationship management, communication, facilitation of individual/group learning, adaptability, problem solving, goal setting, data collection and analysis, and program development. A working knowledge of human resources and employment practices is essential. In addition, we expect our coaches to know or have the aptitude to learn basic money management and budgeting, and they need familiarity with community resources and ability to coordinate services among community resources. Having an International Coaching Federation (ICF) certification is preferred but not required. Workforce Connection has an intensive 3 week orientation to learn the ICF professional coaching code of ethics and competencies as well as goal setting, service coordination and documentation. Our coaches work with other coaches within our organization and across our national network to leverage unique strengths and further collective professional growth.

My company has an EAP program. What is the difference?

Workforce coaching is a complement to, not a replacement for, EAP programs. EAP programs are typically focused on counseling services to address mental and emotional issues. The services are typically short-term in nature with a limit on the number of sessions. While some EAP sessions may be in-person, many conduct their counseling sessions remotely. By contrast, our coaches are on-site and available for as long as an employee needs or desires assistance. Workforce coaches are not only helping resolve immediate needs and crises, but also working with employees on longer-term stability and growth objectives. To the extent that an employee needs counseling, our coaches are trained to recognize such situations and facilitate the connection to your EAP program. It has been our experience that the utilization of a company's EAP service actually increases because coaches are facilitating these connections where employees might not have reached out on their own. Coaching and counseling are not either/or; both have value and can be used in a complementary manner.

What does Workforce Connection cost?

There is no one-size-fits all answer. We will work with you to assess your workforce needs and develop a service package and price based on those needs. Many organizations will not need a full-time coach, while others may need more than one. All of our workforce coaching comes bundled with professional financial coaching, and our assessment will help determine the frequency of that service as well. We also offer a-la-carte training and consulting services. The specific scope and pricing for your organization will depend on a number of factors including your desired outcomes, number of employees, industry/nature of the work, shift schedule, average wages, HR practices, benefit structure, and workforce demographics. To provide a very general order-of-magnitude, the price could range from \$15,000 per year to upwards of \$100,000 per year. In larger companies, we can look at a more selective approach to implementation in specific departments or locations in order to limit cost. Across the spectrum of companies engaging with Workforce Connection or our national WorkLab Innovations affiliates, these companies consistently view their investment in our program as lower than their actual cost of turnover, employee disengagement, and lost productivity; and more than 90% of employers continue to engage our services year-over-year.

How can we market a workforce coach without compromising the dignity of our employees?

We recommend that workforce coaching be positioned as an investment you are making to develop your employees. We have found that the word "coach" does not carry the same stigma as counselor, caseworker or social worker. Coaching is more about "developing" people than "fixing" people, and it should not be positioned or viewed as a service that employees utilize only when they have "problems." While many employees will in fact use the service to help with particular problems, especially at the beginning of the relationship, others in the organization may seek out the coach to work proactively on long-term goals. Because the coach is a third party, and because of the coach/employee confidentiality commitment, employees are less likely to feel that their dignity is being compromised or that their reputation in the company is at risk as a result of their personal challenges.

How can a company with multiple work sites utilize a workforce coach?

If the workforce is spread across a few sites in the Greater Cincinnati region, schedules can be worked out so that the coach is present at each site at a frequency appropriate for the size of workforce there. The coach's contact information is published and shared with employees so that the coach can be accessible if needed between site visits. In situations where the workforce is distributed across many locations and site visits are not feasible, we can utilize a model more dependent on remote coaching via phone or Skype. However, it has been our experience that with remote coaching, fewer employees will engage in the service, and the degree of progress employees make may be limited.

Should everyone go through the program?

We recommend that the program be open to all employees. While lower-wage workers will be most likely to engage, employees at any level could experience similar issues. We work with the employer to promote the program through various channels visible to all employees: new-hire orientation, emails, website, bulletin boards, etc. While we recommend that workforce coaching be voluntary, we also encourage employers to directly refer employees to the coach in "high risk" situations such as absences, attendance warnings, behavior issues, etc. However, the employee is ultimately the decision-maker as to whether they use the services offered.

What is the difference between the manager and workforce coach roles?

The manager's role is to execute company policies and procedures, manage employee performance, and deliver on team goals. When the manager determines that employee performance is impacted by circumstances that fall outside of the work itself, the manager may want to refer the employee to the workforce coach. Frontline managers frequently tell us that they don't have the time, the skills, or the resources to adequately support an employee dealing with tough personal issues. In addition, employees report reluctance to share with their manager the true challenges they are experiencing, out of embarrassment or fear of impact to their job status. The workforce coach offers a safe place to share what is going on, and the professional expertise and resources to help the employee navigate the situation. Managers and coaches can work together to determine trigger points that may result in an automatic touchpoint with the coach – for example, if an employee accrues a certain number of attendance points, is placed on warning for behavior, and the like. Coaches will also check in with managers to see if they are noticing performance improvements as a result of the coaching and determine if additional action is needed.

How to handle trust between coaches and management or coaches and HR?

We share a roles-and-responsibility chart so that all understand each other's roles individually and where they intercept collectively. It is important that the coach is just as intentional with developing a relationship with management and HR as they are with the employees they serve. Our coaches view management and HR as partners in supporting the employees, with a mutual understanding that confidentiality must be maintained. The Director of Workforce Connection manages the overall employer relationships and checks in with HR and management via monthly meetings or phone calls and quarterly meetings to share utilization statistics and outcomes. She is available at any time to address any issues or concerns that may arise.

How do people gain total confidence that the employer will not misuse information?

The biggest concern we hear from employees is a fear of what the manager or organization may do with the information they share, such as: Does it impact my ability to be promoted? Will it result in my termination? Will I be treated differently? During the relationship-building process, the coach explains to the employee that their conversations are held in confidence unless the person gives permission for the coach to share information. At the same time, the coach also discloses that if there is a concern of the person harming themselves or others, this may be a situation where the coach needs to inform someone.

Very sensitive info is unearthed; how do you partner with management and the organization?

When sensitive information is revealed to the coach, if the coach is able to manage it without the support of management or human resources, the coach will do so and provide complete support and follow up on the issue. If sensitive information is revealed and there are additional resources needed from the employer (e.g., leave of absence, FMLA, etc.), the coach will work together with the internal resources and the employee to get the supports in place. The coach lets the employee guide how much information they are comfortable sharing with management and/or HR.

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