

13 Competencies for Effective Peer Coaching

These 13 competencies represent areas in which you need to excel to successfully fulfill your role as a peer coach to other nursing homes.

1. **Communicating Instructions.** The role of coach often involves teaching a skill or procedure to another person. Show staff how to accomplish a task and clarify when, where, how much and to what standard it should be done. The ability to break down a task into easy-to-understand steps that you can articulate to another is vital to being an effective coach.
2. **Setting Performance Goals.** Effective coaching sometimes starts with pointing someone in the right direction. Collaborate with staff to establish short- and long-term goals. First work with staff to set broad goals. Then get specific in agreeing on desired outcomes and how to measure them.
3. **Providing Feedback.** Giving feedback about task performance is critical to improvement. To do this effectively, carefully observe performance on individual tasks and share these observations in a nonthreatening manner. Note what the person is doing well and what can be improved. Then work with the individual to ensure he or she understands your feedback and uses it developmentally.
4. **Rewarding Improvement.** Use a variety of means to provide positive reinforcement to others for making progress on the accomplishment of important tasks. The timing of rewards is as important as the reward. Don't wait until you see either perfection or failure on the task. Look for growth in task accomplishment and reward that soon after you observe it. Although coaches don't always control formal rewards (e.g., pay, perks, promotions), you can make frequent and effective use of informal ones (e.g., a pat on the back, other nonmonetary recognition).
5. **Dealing with Failure.** When someone demonstrates an inability or unwillingness to perform a task according to expectations and standards, you need to deal with the result. This may mean encouraging, reprimanding, retraining or otherwise affecting his or her ability or willingness. Patience can be a virtue or an enabler of more failure. Use it wisely.
6. **Working with Personal Issues.** Coaches are not expected to function as counselors or psychotherapists. However, faced with an individual whose personal situation is interfering with his or her performance, you may need to intervene. You can offer emotional support, listening empathically and without judgment. A good rule of thumb, though, is that if you feel "in over your head," you are. Be prepared to refer the person to appropriate professional assistance and adjust the coaching process to support the situation.

7. **Confronting Difficult Situations.** Coaching often involves situations when performance does not meet expectations. This can lead to finger-pointing, denial of personal responsibility and other dysfunctional behaviors, making everyone involved uncomfortable. Good coaching requires the honesty and courage to confront these situations head-on, but with tact and diplomacy.
8. **Responding to Requests.** When you respond to requests in a timely manner, you show the staff you coach that they are high on your priority list. Timely response to requests is a tangible indicator of respect.
9. **Following Through.** Trust is a critical component of any coaching relationship. Keeping your commitments and providing additional assistance when necessary helps build and maintain trust. Showing an ongoing commitment to the long-term success of the staff you coach also builds strong relationships.
10. **Listening for Understanding.** Listening is another indicator of respect. It requires an open mind to what others say, being attentive to both the content of what is being said and the feelings being expressed (sometimes unconsciously). Effective listening involves conveying your understanding by reflecting what you hear. You can do this by using such phrases as, “What I hear you saying is...” and “You seem to be concerned about...”
11. **Motivating Others.** There are no hard and fast rules to what motivates anyone. However, to inspire the enthusiasm and commitment necessary for achieving desired results, you must know what motivates the person you are coaching and tie his or her desires and goals into the task at hand. This requires continual assessment and reassessment of the situation and the person. Trying to “read” the person can waste time and effort. Instead, just ask. Find out what is important to him or her and how the task relates.
12. **Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses.** Identifying the abilities and interests of the staff you are coaching directs your efforts to the most critical areas. This involves the keen observation of people and situations and attention to detail. It also means probing beneath the surface of any problems that arise to distinguish between symptoms and root causes. Without accurate assessment, your coaching efforts might be spent on addressing the wrong problem or a nonexistent one.
13. **Building Rapport and Trust.** Rapport and trust are the cornerstones of effective coaching relationships. The staff you coach must know you have their best interests at heart. If those you coach respect and trust you, they will be more forthcoming with errors, failures and shortcomings, and any advice, teaching and counseling you offer will be more readily accepted.

