



**Supporting Youth at Risk from Training to Employment: Meeting their  
Psycho-Social Needs**

**Notes from**

Deborah Barthley-Francis  
Goddard Catering Group (Antigua) Ltd.



**Presenter: Deborah Barthley-Francis, Goddard Catering Group (Antigua) Ltd.**

To succeed in today's competitive and fast changing marketplace, Employers are demanding well trained, highly skilled employees who will take their organisations to the next level. It is believed that having employees coming into the workplace with the required skill sets lessens the burden of the organization to provide training, as qualified staff would require less training to function effectively in their duties. However, I am sure we all can agree that it takes more than skills to make a productive employee.

It is my view that employers who select their staff solely on the basis of qualification through certification run the risk of sacrificing loyal, committed, teachable and motivated employees in favour of having a complement of qualified staff. Please permit me to point out that I'm not suggesting that Companies abandon the idea of securing competent staff to assist in driving forward the affairs of the organization. I am suggesting however that the right employee is not determined solely on the basis of certificate and experience. It is an obvious fact that the purpose of running a business is to make profit, that's the bottom line. However, this should not preclude our responsibility to our society. As Cooperate citizens we have a significant role in helping to mitigate some of the social challenges facing our various communities and societies. These challenges are represented by the number of youth who have failed for one reason or another to achieve a secondary education. They are virtually unskilled which makes their prospects for meaningful employment rather dismal. Facing such a plight compounded by the need to survive and the demands placed upon them by their restless youthful energies, the choices they make are often bad ones. So let's pause for a second and ponder on some questions, we as Employers are demanding the best of the best and rightly so but who will be responsible for those who have dropped out of school and looking for break? Is it the responsibility of the social welfare of the government, society, church or is it us as Employers who should be looking to provide that opportunity if it is available in our organizations. The truth is, if no one cares enough to intercept the fall, their lives would be ruined and we as members of society pay a great price in the process.

It is for this reason, that I commend to you the efforts of the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Programme in endeavoring to throw a life line that equips the regions vulnerable with technical, vocational and life skills needed to secure and sustain decent jobs. The fruit of their labour will only be realized if we as employers are willing to complement their efforts by offering opportunities for employment to the youths in this programme.

Ladies and gentlemen, my encouragement to you to participate in this life changing endeavor is not simply a matter of rhetoric. Over the past several years, Goddard Catering Group (Antigua) Ltd, The Company I represent has employed three young men from this programme and I am delighted to record our satisfaction with their development to date. This is not only demonstrated in their knowledge and skills in performing their duties but their attitude, commitment and team spirit make them shining examples of the positive impact of CYEP. We must understand that these employees see themselves as having received a second chance in life to make a success and therefore, they are eager to work. They are driven individuals who take their work seriously because they are truly grateful for the opportunity given. It is not my intention to convey to you the notion that they were tailor-made for our operation when they came. Apart from providing the necessary training to enable them to function effectively in their positions, we took time to interact with them on the broader issues of life. They did not always meet the standard of performance required or displayed the proper conduct but their supervisors took the time to nurture them and provided support for their personal and professional development. They stand out as exhibits of the great transformation work of CYEP and make a compelling argument for you, who have not come on board to do so. It is my firm belief that as a manager/ employer, if you are given the opportunity to develop someone who is willing and eager, you should take it.

I am quite certain that I have already convinced you to participate in this programme. Thank You. Thanks also to those of you who are already involved. Your efforts are vitally important. I feel compelled however to impress upon you the need to go a step further. We might be tempted to celebrate our efforts to find employment for these person we so graciously embraced. The question therefore I should ask, I that enough? Are we satisfied with the impact we have made on their lives? Have you created the infrastructure geared towards personal development beyond the workplace? What have we done to provide them with the tools necessary to negotiate the challenges they may encounter outside of our establishment?

My intentions is neither to criticize nor scold but to challenge us to find a new path that leads to the advancement of cooperative goals and the development of well rounded and productive individuals. Let me suggest that consideration be given to providing coaching and mentoring opportunities for our new employees.

What is coaching? Parsloe in his book "The Manager as Coach and Mentor defines coaching as "a process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve". Organisations have a responsibility to support youths in the beginning. If you hire them, you need to guide them along the path you would like them to take.

It is therefore the responsibility of the coach to provide direction to employees in adding personal attributes to their knowledge and skills. A coach would be expected to know each player on his team, their strengths and weaknesses and provide the necessary measures to help each member improve. As employers, we are at times guilty of demanding what we have not developed. If we invest the time in coaching and not dictating we would learn more about our staff which would make us better equipped to assist them. They may not be always at a level which we prefer and it is at those times our support and understanding prove vital.

Secondly, mentoring. The idea of mentoring in the workplace might sound strange and must be considered ambitious. However, if we see our organization exist as part of a wider society we would appreciate the significance of our involvement in mentoring our young people.

Clutterbuck, D & Megginson, in their book, *Mentoring Executives and Directors*, describe the process of mentoring as "off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking". The sequences we have gained through life, place us further along the learning curve compared to young and inexperienced colleagues. Mentoring would provide them with the knowledge to avoid some of the pit falls that we through ignorance have fallen into.

Young people need and wants to be guided not controlled. If we prove to them that we genuinely care for them it will engender trust and confidence which are important in the mentoring process.

My fellow employers, mentoring does not only benefit the employee but also the employers. It has been proven that employees who are mentored become more confident in carrying out their duties resulting in greater productivity for the business. There is also increased job satisfaction and low staff turnover as employees possess a greater sense of loyalty to the company.

It is my hope that I have been able to challenge us to think and act differently when it comes to CYEP graduates and their abilities to cope in the workplace and providing them with an opportunity to facilitate their aspirations. We must expand our vision and embrace our responsibility to provide the mechanism within our organizations to facilitate the growth and development of all staff. It is not enough for us to talk and believe in coaching and mentoring. We must go further and enshrine those responsibilities in the policy of the organisations which will guarantee success for our efforts.

THANK YOU!