Coaching Teams to Higher Performance

By Rosemary Laack

In the mechanical and plumbing trades where schedules are tight, margins are thin, and safety is non-negotiable, crews need more than traditional supervision. They need leaders who can *coach*, not just manage. Managing and coaching are often confused, but the difference matters. Managing keeps today's tasks moving, while coaching builds the crew's capability for tomorrow. When leaders shift from "telling" to "teaching," crews become more engaged, more adaptable, and more invested in the work.

Here are a few practical coaching behaviors you can apply immediately in the field:

1. **Ask guiding questions before giving answers.** Instead of giving the fix right away, try:
    - "How do you want to lay out this run?"
    - "What risks do we need to consider before we fire this up?"
    - "If this goes sideways, what's our backup?"

    This builds foresight and ownership.

2. **Give short, specific feedback in the moment.** Generic comments ("Good job") don't change behavior. Specific ones do:
    - "Your prep work kept us from losing an hour."
    - "The way you coordinated with the GC prevented a conflict."

    This reinforces quality standards, safety, and communication.

3. **Build quick debriefs into the workflow.** Two minutes at the end of a shift can transform performance:
    - "What went well today?"
    - "Where did we get hung up?"
    - "What should we adjust tomorrow?"

    These micro–lessons stack up fast.

Coaching becomes especially important when field conditions shift or coordination with other trades becomes more challenging. A crew that can think ahead and solve problems on the spot keeps the project moving without delays or rework.

In today's trades, coaching isn't optional. It's a competitive advantage. Leaders who coach reduce rework, improve communication, and build crews that stay engaged and committed.

By strengthening people, not just directing tasks, you build stronger teams and stronger organizations for the future.

Rosemary Laack is the President and Founder of Supernova Coaching Enterprises. A former Fortune 500 leader and team-building expert, she now helps organizations strengthen leadership, improve communication, and build high-performing teams.