Coaching

How to make it work for you

Introduction

Coaching has entered the mainstream of development. It is enjoying both wide spread acclaim and strident criticism at the same time. This paper outlines some of the key challenges in making coaching effective and offers guidance to those both new to and familiar with coaching. It outlines the key features of effective coaching.

Whilst coaching in organisations has been around a long time, it has become much more widespread in the past 20 years. Initially the coaching model drew on the experience of people coaching sports players and musicians. It often implied 'expertise' in the coach, although sports coaches frequently underline the importance of getting commitment to personal goals and an underlying self motivation. Thomas Leonard is credited with beginning the current boom in life and work coaching and his interest began when he discovered clients wanting to talk about their goals and themselves.

What is coaching?

At its simplest coaching is the process of helping someone to improve, do something differently or overcome challenges and dilemmas. Within this simplicity there are a number of different forms of coaching. In "The Reflecting Glass", West and Milan outline three types of coaching

Skills coaching - where the goals and objectives are finite and concrete, the coaching style is quite directive and the duration of the coaching is short term.
Performance coaching – where the goals are less clear and the focus is on overall performance issues.
Development coaching – where the goals and objectives are typically emergent and complex, where the coaching style is non-directive and duration likely to be longer term.

Coaching is also seen by many authors to sit between Consulting and Counselling in the 'helping other people' continuum and to overlap in both directions.



Coaching – the benefits

To the individual who is coached

- improved current performance
- greater self determination, self development and self reliance
- taking greater responsibility for their own actions
- opportunities to guide activities towards areas of strengths and interests
- increased openness to learning and development
- better advancement prospects

To the organisation that encourages coaching

- higher levels of achievement of individual and organisational goals
- opportunities to agree challenging goals
- better information on which to plan future organisation and manpower requirements
- staff better equipped to take on and deliver change
- better use of people's capability and potential
- fostering a responsive can-do attitude

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The Coaching Process

Coaching, at one level, is an essentially simple and also very complex process – "working with someone so that they are able to achieve a goal or goals for themselves". Within this process are a number of elements that apply - at the overall level, that work across the complete coaching relationship and within each session. These elements are,

- Building rapport
- Contracting and setting goals
- Transformation and working to achieve the goals
- Ending, reviewing and moving on

Building rapport

Without an effective relationship, overall and within each session, productive coaching is impossible. The relationship matters. It is the bedrock of effective coaching on which everything that follows is built. At the outset of a new relationship trust is built, boundaries established, differences and common ground noted and current circumstances explored. These factors are addressed at the beginning of each session.

Key point – always allow time for this aspect of the coaching relationship. Take time to catch up, find out how "things are right now" before you dive into today's business.

Contracting, Setting Goals and Expectations

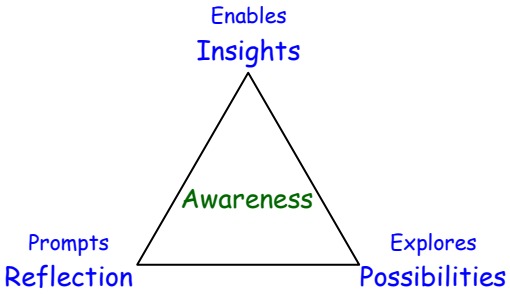
This crucial element sets the framework within which effective coaching can take place. In this element the following are agreed,

- pattern and number of sessions
- the length of each session
- issues relating to confidentiality
- the needs of other parties, Human Resources, Line Manager, Colleagues, Staff
- fees and invoicing arrangements
- **the actual coaching objectives, goals and desired outcomes**

Key point – unless this element is managed effectively, at every session, coaching can remain at the useful sounding board level and miss the opportunity to deliver real value.

Transformation and working to achieve the goals

Within this element the coach will be listening, enquiring, challenging, probing and offering suggestions. We have developed a model to illustrate the four primary themes,



During a session the coach may also introduce tools, ideas or techniques aimed at helping the coachee move forwards. These may include ideas to improve self-awareness, tools to assist in improving communication, insights to help expand choices and possibilities. *See "TP's tools for change" for a more comprehensive list.*

Key point – the coachee takes ownership of their own issues and challenges. The coach's primary role is to help the coachee find new choices and possibilities. This may include making suggestions and will almost certainly involve facilitating increased awareness and insight.

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Ending, reviewing and moving on

The end of a coaching assignment is an important event. The more effective the coaching relationship has been the more important the ending is likely to be. There are a number of factors to be managed at the end,

- evaluating the outcomes and the process
- achieving appropriate closure to the relationship
- providing feedback to the original sponsor as appropriate
- agreeing if there is to be any further contact

Key point – it is often easy to rush this element and so not gain the maximum benefit for the coaching process or end the relationship effectively.

What the coach and coachee might be doing between sessions

Between sessions the coachee will be carrying out committed actions. As a consequence they may need to speak to the coach before the next session and this between sessions contact needs to have been agreed at the outset. For some it is important to have informal contact. The coach might be exploring or seeking out ideas and possibilities to help the coachee learn and develop. This might also take the form of preparing themselves, or getting third party help, in finding more effective ways to challenge and probe.

Key point – ensure agreement is obtained about expectations of contact between sessions.

Making coaching effective

Personal chemistry is important

As has already been outlined the relationship between coach and coachee is the bedrock on which progress takes place. From personal chemistry comes trust – a vital component of effective coaching. Coachees often tell their coach things they do not tell other people. Whilst coaches typically have good interpersonal skills, high levels of self awareness, insight and sensitivity, this does not meant that they can coach anyone.
The coach and coachee need to be aware that having time to establish that the personal chemistry will work is important. It is better to find out before starting that the relationship may/will not work rather than after a few sessions when stopping is more difficult. There is no set of steps that will enable a confident decision to be made about personal chemistry. Allowing time to talk about approach, personal idiosyncrasies, preferences and style will help ensure that the relationship has a chance to work. This time will be well spent and begin the building of trust between coach and coachee.

Key point – personal chemistry is vital. It is a significant factor in building trust. Ensure both parties are comfortable before you get too far into the relationship.

Commitment

Coaching takes time – differing amounts of time for different people. Successful coaching requires that the coachee commits their time to sessions with their coach and to completing any agreed actions between sessions. Without commitment coaching is a waste of time, money and energy.
One of the challenging areas is if someone has been 'told' to have coaching. This is often not a good starting point for building a committed and trusting relationship. It is up to the coach to guide the coachee through the initial meeting to establish that commitment is genuine and that the coachee is able and willing to take ownership of their issues and development, ensuring that they really do want to do if for themselves, not because someone else has told them to.
Many organisations are talking about creating a coaching culture. Commitment from people throughout an organisation, especially those at the top - who are key role models, is a vital factor to achieving a new culture.

Key point – have something you really want to work on. Don't do it for reasons of vanity of pressure - without commitment coaching does not work effectively.

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Choosing a coach

The relationship with a coach needs to be professional. Friends do not often make good coaches. Friendship can get in the way when a challenge is required to help the coachee learn and develop.
Consider what is wanted from a coach, what styles would and would not suit. Most coaches have colleagues they can recommend if the chemistry with a first choice will not work.
When choosing a coach ensure there are foundations for trust and respect, that the coach has the coachee's best interests in mind, and will appropriately challenge and stimulate.

Key point – choose a coach you trust and respect whom you do not find "too comfortable".

Getting the best from a coach

Within the overall coaching relationship and each coaching session a wide variety of thoughts, insights, challenges and difficulties can arise. No two coaching sessions will follow exactly the pattern. The coach will be on the lookout for opportunities to probe and challenge and the coachee will give thought to what particular issues need to be focused on today.
To get the best from a coach the coachee needs to be actively involved in the process, to take ownership of the issues, set high expectations for themselves and the coach and allow time for reflection and observation outside of the coaching sessions.

Key point – getting the best from your coach requires the coachee to be involved, committed to the process and to be willing to create dialogue in the coaching sessions.

What next?

Do you have a goal which seems particularly challenging?
Have you been asked to take on something new?
Are you committed to your own development?

Would you like a partner on that journey?

References and further reading

Flaherty, James. *Coaching – evoking excellence in others*. Butterworth Heinemann 1999.

Hardingham, Alison et al. *The coaches coach*. CIPD, London, 2004

Lee, Graham. *Leadership coaching*. CIPD, London, 2003

O'Neill, Mary Beth. *Executive coaching with backbone and heart*. Jossey Bass, 2000

West, Lucy & Milan, Mike. *The Reflecting Glass*. Palgrave, 2001

Other resources

"The Alchemy tools" – ideas, suggestions and techniques for change and development.

The Association for Coaching www.associationforcoaching.com

Contacting Alchemy of Coaching

For more information about our experienced team of coaches or other ideas to do with coaching and personal development please visit our website **www.alchemyofcoaching.com** or contact one of our three partners

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