

What is Coaching?

How Coaching could transform your business

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1. How Coaching works

The most flexible, innovative and effective organisational development tool, Coaching has surged into businesses over the last 10 years. As employees feel subsumed by organisational culture and goals, Coaching's emphasis on developing the individual has proved highly effective at motivating the whole person and in boosting performance and productivity at work.

As long ago as 2001, a survey conducted amongst Fortune 1000 companies concluded that of those receiving Coaching, 53% had increased productivity, 39% had increased customer service, 32% had increased their retention of senior people and more than 20% had reduced costs and increased profits*.

The same survey reported that individuals within these businesses had also improved relationships with their managers, teams and clients and experienced a significant reduction in conflict at work.

Coaching has many softer, broader benefits. It can be deployed exactly when and where it's needed. It is fast and effective and doesn't need any special facilities. It can be used to great effect in a wide variety of situations, just a few of which are: -

- **Support** for managers of small businesses where there are limited management resources. An outside perspective adds value to the business development and decision-making process
- **Flexibility** for busy senior people who don't have the time to attend off-site training. Coaching can be conducted effectively by telephone and arranged to fit their schedules
- **Speed** for businesses who need to deploy additional support to their managers quickly or who need a readily available resource without taking on a permanent overhead
- **Mentoring** for senior managers and executives when an objective thinking partner is needed to work through difficult or important decisions.

Coaching's value then is obvious. There's a mound of evidence, and little doubt that, given a competent facilitator, it delivers impressive benefits to both the individual and the organisation.

2. So what is Coaching?

There is no single definition of Coaching or mentoring and when you're discussing it with a view to buying it, make sure you and everyone else involved is clear about precisely what it means to you. In 2005, the CIPD (the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development) defined it as a way of supporting individuals to: -

- Develop skills
- Maximise potential
- Increase performance
- Become the person they want to be

In other words, it can help people to achieve significantly more in their lives and work and often produces extraordinarily effective results.

Coaching takes the form of a guided conversation between the Coach and the client. The client will choose the subject and the Coach will help them to focus issues and generate new perspectives on these. The aim of Coaching is to expand the client's awareness of the challenges they face, examine their habitual responses and support them in recognising and removing the blocks to achieving their potential. The Coach may use a number of tools, techniques and psychological models to facilitate these exchanges and ensure they are productive. By setting goals and focusing on future objectives, Coaching can accelerate learning and help the client identify and adopt new strategies for improving their performance.

3. Introducing Coaching to your organisation

If your business is new to Coaching, make sure everyone's ready for it. It's worth preparing the ground so that your people are aware of its benefits and recognise it as an opportunity rather than a threat.

A simple survey to understand employee attitudes can be a useful way of consulting staff and introducing a learning culture. You'll be able to see how much employees believe your business already supports their development and what kind of climate exists for Coaching. Key indicators in survey results would be an implied need for: -

- All managers to have basic feedback, performance management or coaching skills
- Employees to have the opportunity to be coached effectively
- Senior and HR managers to acquire more advanced coaching skills
- Managers demonstrating good coaching behaviour to be recognised and rewarded
- Cultural and process barriers to behavioural change to be addressed

To start a successful Coaching initiative Senior and HR directors must make their managers aware of what a vitally important part they will play in getting buy-in from staff across the business. It can be a worthwhile to invest in a half-day session to introduce managers to the benefits and process of Coaching and to brief them on the initiative programme.

Managers will need to inform, motivate and encourage employees to participate. They must communicate the valuable opportunity Coaching offers for personal and skills development, emphasise the importance of each person's commitment to their own process and provide reassurance about its confidentiality.

In practical terms, they will need to release staff to attend Coaching sessions and integrate Coaching goals into their ongoing assessment of each individual.

When assessing potential participants in the Coaching programme, it's wise not to include them if they have: -

- Psychological problems or evidence of personal or professional crisis
- A development need that exists throughout the business – other types of training will be more appropriate and probably more cost-effective
- Resistance or an unwillingness to take responsibility for their behaviour
- A lack of self-awareness and self-insight
- Inappropriate behaviour
- They intend to retire or leave the company.

Finally, here is a checklist of the issues and steps you need to consider to ensure the introduction of Coaching into your business is a success: -

√	How Coaching works best
1	Take steps to establish a learning culture and Coaching climate
2	Get the buy-in of managers, explain their role and brief them on the programme
3	Consider each individual participant's readiness for Coaching
4	Brief the individual and set your expectations of them
5	Ensure the chemistry is right between the Coach and the individual
6	Explain how the Coaching will be approached and agree clear goals for each individual
7	Allow the Coaching a broad focus – performance is more likely to improve if issues are approached from several different angles
8	Don't ask for interim feedback about the individuals from the Coach it will be detrimental to results
9	Review Coaching formally and informally with the individual subject at regular intervals ie through the process
10	After the Coaching is completed, discuss what further development and support each person requires with the Coach, the individual, their line manager and HR.

4. The Coaching process

A specific Coaching plan will typically be developed for each individual, based on a thorough understanding of their background, challenges, goals, aspirations and learning style. Also of their dreams, passions and enthusiasms, within and outside work. It's important to set realistic goals for the Coaching programme, agree how many sessions will be provided and confirm how and when results might be assessed and measured.

The Coaching process shown here has 4 distinct phases. After an initial review, clients commit to their personal Coaching plan before embarking on the Coaching itself in Phase 3. The whole process is fully documented so that everyone involved is clear about their commitment and objectives.

COACHING PHASE 1 Where are you now?	COACHING PHASE 2 Goal setting and Coaching plan	COACHING PHASE 3 Personal Coaching programme	COACHING PHASE 4 Review and future training needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insights Personality Profile • Current skills and talents • Learning style • Assessment questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemistry session • Goal-setting • Programme design • Commit to coaching contract and ground rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face or phone • Tailored tools and techniques • Sessions scheduled to work with your own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review progress and goals • Consolidate habits and principles • Coaching completion • Ongoing personal and professional development

5. Choosing the right Coaching partner

Its very rapid expansion means that Coaching remains a largely unregulated profession. Within it there are excellent Coaches, wholeheartedly committed to their clients' and their own professional development. But there are many who lack the skills, training and experience needed to offer safe, effective Coaching.

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) plays an important role in accrediting coaching programmes but it will be some time before its professional standards are universally accepted. Until then, a good business or consultancy background is no indicator of Coaching capability and there are still many Coaches who have completed only the most basic weekend's training.

When you're looking for a Coaching partner, spend time with them. Trust your instincts and remember they will be dealing with some of the most sensitive and confidential issues in your organisation. Here's an essential checklist of what look for and who to avoid in your search.

X	Avoid Coaches who...	✓	Choose Coaches who...
	<p>You instinctively have doubts about</p> <p>Have only basic 'life coaching' or 'business coaching' qualifications</p> <p>Lack of qualifications, accreditation and professional membership</p> <p>Can't clearly explain the model they use</p> <p>Can't clearly describe their offer in terms of what they can and cannot do</p> <p>Break confidentiality or describe identifiable individuals or clients</p> <p>Have therapeutic but no business or organisational experience</p> <p>Have no defined coaching process and no mechanic for assessing results</p> <p>Take personal credit for past coaching results "I fixed this guy" or who see coaching as a power trip</p> <p>Have only worked on outplacement projects.</p>		<p>You like, are self-aware and have good listening and questioning skills</p> <p>Have comprehensive qualifications from an accredited training organisation</p> <p>Use a defined Coaching process with some element of accountability and a willingness to adapt this to your needs</p> <p>Are demonstrably committed to their own professional development and training</p> <p>Are regularly supervised and assessed by an independent 3rd party</p> <p>Have robust business and coaching experience in relevant sectors</p> <p>Provide referees and encourage you to speak to their other clients</p> <p>Have training in a broad range of tools, techniques and psychological models</p> <p>Have membership of reputable and appropriate professional bodies</p> <p>Have professional indemnity insurance.</p>

6. In summary

Coaching is an exciting, rapidly developing discipline with emerging regulatory and industry standards. Up-front investment is required to initiate a learning culture and create the right environment for Coaching. By using trained, experienced Coaches to deliver well-planned Coaching programmes, as outlined here, you are likely to generate tangible results for your people, a significant uplift in morale and motivation and great returns on your investment in terms of both performance and profit.

* Source: Manchester Review 2001, Vol 6;1; and Executive Coaching – With Returns a CFO Could Love, Fortune Magazine 19 February 2001.