

Coaching - the best way to improve performance



Coaching is becoming increasingly popular as a way to develop people - and rightly so. Our aim is to let you know how it might help you and your business by answering some of the common questions we get asked.

What is coaching?

Coaching is an extremely powerful way of developing people and improving their performance. A Coach works alongside a "coachee" during a series of confidential one-to-one sessions to help them clarify what they want to achieve, develop or do differently. This can be done in conjunction with their boss and may range from developing confidence to deliver powerful presentations to managing their staff more effectively. The coach then helps the coachee define and implement action plans to achieve their goals.

Whatever the challenge, coaching can be employed to help people achieve their goals.

What's all the fuss about?

In our view Coaching is the single most effective way to improve someone's performance. Why? Well with good coaching the coachee commits to doing things differently as a result of the coaching session. The skill is in getting the person being coached to think through how their behaviour is currently impacting their performance. Once they realise they have a choice in how they operate it is just a matter of putting actions in place that will bring about the desired change. The key is that because it is the coachee who generates the action plan they are more likely to implement it.

What problems will it solve?

Coaching is a highly effective way to improve someone's performance. It is most effective where:

- You don't want to send someone on a training course (maybe because they've been on courses before and nothing changed!)
- The development need is not related to knowledge or skill, but attitude or behaviour. For example many managers are promoted through technical excellence, not necessarily interpersonal excellence.
- You need to develop someone's performance quickly
- You want to develop someone to take on a more senior role
- You want to develop someone who has just been appointed to a more senior role and is not quite ready
- You don't have the time to develop someone yourself
- Someone has the basic knowledge and skill to do their job but for some reason they are not performing
- Someone has the capability to achieve something but they don't believe that they can

How does coaching work?

Coaching is most effective when someone needs to change their behaviour, but changing someone's behaviour requires several things to happen in sequence:

- they need to have their awareness heightened regarding how effectively (or not) they are operating currently
- they need to recognise that there is room to improve their performance
- they need to take responsibility for changing their behaviour and commit to doing things differently on a sustained basis

Coaching is, therefore, best done during a series of one-to-one sessions. The coach and the coachee build a close personal relationship which allows the coachee to openly share their goals, thoughts and feelings with the objective of helping the coachee:

- define clear goals (these can be personal or professional)
- to reflect on how they are currently performing
- to reflect on how their behaviour is impacting their current level of performance and their relationships with others
- to think through how they might behave differently
- to commit to concrete actions and to review the progress against those actions

Why is it different from training?

Training courses tend to be good at imparting knowledge and teaching specific skills, but they have been researched to be quite poor methods in actually causing people to change their behaviour. Even if they concentrate on increasing knowledge, most people only retain about 20% of what they “learn” on a course. To create sustained behaviour change we first need to challenge and change people’s attitudes. They need to think through how their attitudes and beliefs are impacting their behaviour and how their behaviour is impacting their performance. It’s a cliché, but not many smokers give up smoking having attended a “Dangers of Smoking” course. Most smokers know the risks involved in smoking and they know how to give up. Smokers will only change their behaviour once they have made a conscious decision to do so and commit to doing it for themselves.

Coaching challenges people's attitudes around how they choose to behave and secures their commitment to change.

Executive Coaching

The Business Case

As a senior manager or maybe even the boss - who can you turn to if you're having doubts about your job? Who can you trust to discuss your challenges with? Who will give you impartial and objective feedback? Who will help you evaluate your performance and support you in doing things differently?

The Benefits

Coaching for senior managers and executives is used as an opportunity to consult someone new. The chance to bounce ideas and issues off of someone who is not involved in the company but who’s investment is purely in you as the coachee and your success!

In taking stock and clearly acknowledging your situation, challenging issues and current behaviour, executive coaching will help you identify where you want to be or what you want to achieve with clearly defined goals and objectives. With the support of a coach you will be encouraged and challenged to create and implement an action plan while constantly reviewing and reflecting on progress, competence and learning.

By improving the performance of senior managers who lead and influence others you will undoubtedly improve results throughout the organisation.

Developing a Coaching Culture

By helping your managers develop a coaching management style you will see a direct impact on the increase of employee motivation and performance.

Managers who use a dictatorial management style will make all the decisions and tell everyone what to do and how to do it. The result is that people do not learn as much as they could, they become afraid to take responsibility and unwilling to make decisions. The result? The manager feels the need to make all the decisions and tell everyone what to do and how to do it, feeling increasingly frustrated with their people, working longer hours and getting more and more stressed and employees feel the need to complain about their boss, resent the fact that they are not trusted or appreciated and ultimately look for another job.

Coaching managers provide support, guidance and feedback as opposed to detailed instructions and answers. They encourage employees to think for themselves, take responsibility, solve problems when they arise rather than the manager wading in, and to confidently make decisions.

It takes time and it is not easy to stop providing all the answers, but the long term benefits are significant.

How do we achieve it?

Culture is all about what we say and do and how we say and do it. To change the culture means that managers have to change their behaviour. One option is to train managers in coaching techniques, but as we have argued elsewhere training has limited impact, especially where the outcome required is a change in behaviour. Training is a good start, but the best way is to provide managers themselves with coaching. In this way they can reflect on the impact of their actions and put in place plans to improve their style.