

Coaching in the Workplace

This paper covers the main areas to consider when implementing coaching in the workplace:

- What is Coaching?
- The Benefits of Coaching
- Difficulties Of Coaching In The Workplace
- Overcoming These Difficulties

Introduction

Coaching seems to be the new buzzword in development. Professional coaches are springing up in great numbers and in various guises – Executive Coaches, Business Coaches, Performance Coaches, etc. These people come from a range of backgrounds (HR, Training, Psychology, Sports coaching, for example) and can have differing approaches.

The C.I.P.D say that “Coaching is an increasingly popular tool for supporting personal development. Just over seven out of ten respondents in the C.I.P.D Learning and development survey 2008 reported that they now used coaching in their organisations. 44% offered coaching to all employees whilst just under two fifths offer it to Directors and senior management. Previous C.I.P.D surveys have sought to record the rise of coaching. ‘Apart from a ‘blip’ in 2007, the high and stable results for coaching and mentoring show that the technique is very much here to stay. The accent of research on coaching is now on the issues of purpose and capability. Our 2008 survey, for example, also reports on the recorded purpose of coaching: just over three fifths see its main purpose as general personal development, just over half use the technique for transition support and 35% use it both as a culture change tool and to support organisational objectives.”

This article aims to clarify what coaching is, why it should be used and some of the difficulties which can arise from coaching in the workplace. This article aims to clarify what coaching is, why it should be used and some of the difficulties which can arise from coaching in the workplace.

What Is Coaching?

The key characteristics of coaching are:

- it tends to be carried out one-to-one
- it aims to help an individual develop in some way, e.g. to improve performance
- it is an approach which allows the person being coached to gain awareness and insight rather than directly telling them what to do or what they should learn, so the coach does not usually give direct advice
- it is focused on helping the individual achieve specific goals and is directed towards action
- it can be used to address a wide range of issues
- the coaching discussion is based on the coachee’s agenda and needs, not the coach’s
- it requires an honest and open relationship between the coach and the coachee, where the coach is supportive and encouraging

The aim of coaching is to develop awareness and responsibility in the coachee through a process where he or she comes to recognise the best course of action to take in order to move forward. The coach, therefore, tries to avoid giving direct advice or offering his or her own solution and, instead, asks a series of questions to draw out the thoughts of the coachee.

One of the most popular models used to structure coaching is the GROW model outlined in Sir John Whitmore's book "Coaching For Performance".

- **Goals** – what do you want to achieve?
- **Reality** – what have you done so far? What has been the result?
- **Options** – what alternatives are available?
- **Way forward** – what are you going to do?

This model emphasise the idea that coaching is based on establishing clear goals and leads to action rather than being a "talking shop" to explore the feelings of the coachee with no specific outcome. The absence of direct advice distinguishes coaching from other forms of development activity, such as mentoring. In mentoring (or some so-called "buddy systems") one person passes on knowledge or experience to another, helping them "learn the ropes".

The Benefits Of Coaching

As mentioned above, one of the aims of coaching is to develop awareness and responsibility. Through careful questioning, the coachee is helped to develop goals and see the best way forward to achieve them, often reviewing past performance in the process.

The idea is that, through this thought process, the person being coached will arrive at solutions which are more likely to be relevant and realistic because they have come from the coachee and have not been imposed by someone else. The person is also likely to be more committed to taking the necessary actions.

The benefits for the individual can be:

- increased motivation and commitment
- improved decision making
- clearer goals and objectives
- greater self awareness
- improved ability to deal with change
- increased confidence and self-reliance
- improved ability to work independently
- greater sense of responsibility, e.g. for own development

As far as the organisation is concerned, there are obvious advantages in having motivated employees, committed to achieving clear goals and improving performance. There should be greater productivity

and more self – reliance amongst the employees, with less need for regular supervision by management.

This can be particularly helpful in organisations where employees are dispersed over a number of offices or site and need to be able to work independently and to be self – motivating.

Coaching can be used to complement other training and development initiatives. For example, it can be used to follow up training courses and help people to implement what they have learned. Since much learning which takes place on courses can dissipate as soon as the person gets back to work, using coaching to ensure the transfer of learning can greatly increase the Return on Investment in training.

Difficulties Of Coaching In The Workplace

Coaching involves a different relationship between coach and coachee than exists in the usual management structures found in most organisations. In some cases, organisations will ask their own managers to coach, rather than bringing in external coaches. This can cause difficulties but, if the organisation wishes to develop coaching as the predominant management style, then these issues need to be addressed and a solid programme be developed.

First of all, both parties may be very used to the traditional management role, expecting the manager to “solve problems “ or tell the other person what is best, and may have problems adjusting to the new relationship. There may be resistance on both sides.

Secondly, even if the manager is happy to try the new approach, he or she may lack the necessary skills to coach effectively and may need further training.

The key skills and attributes of an effective coach include:

- questioning – use of a wide range of questions to develop the coaching conversation and lead the coachee towards awareness and action
- listening – high level listening skills and an ability to avoid the usual barriers to effective listening such as anticipating the answer, wanting to give own opinion, judging the answer, wanting to guide the conversation in one direction
- empathy
- ability to be non-judgemental
- ability to refrain from giving direct advice and to let the coachee develop his or her own solutions
- ability to build rapport and trust

Further, the coaching relationship depends on a level of openness and honesty between the parties. Also, the conversation should, as far as possible, follow the coachee’s agenda rather than that of the coach.

These requirements can be difficult to achieve in the workplace, especially where the manager doing the coaching also has line responsibility for the coachee. This can severely restrict the level of trust and openness. Also, there may be limits on the extent to which the coachee can determine the agenda

when the organisation itself will clearly have expectations in terms of performance and acceptable actions.

Overcoming These Difficulties

Organisations can address these problems by separating coaching from other areas of management, for instance, making sure coaches are not also the line managers of those they are coaching, and by clarifying the boundaries (if any) of the coaching conversations that take place.

They can also try to establish a “ coaching culture “ by showing that coaching takes place throughout the organisation and at all levels and is not seen either as a remedial approach for underperformers or as an activity which is less valued than more traditional management approaches.

Coaching is on the increase. It has passed the stage of being the latest trend or fad and has become accepted by many businesses as part of their management and development activities. However, the success of any coaching initiative depends on a number of factors, primarily the quality of the coaches involved and the degree of understanding within the organisation of what coaching involves, why it is being introduced and what it is intended to achieve.

Sourcing Professional Support

Mike Barnett Human Resources provide coaching services and the development of programmes to develop a coaching culture within client organisations. This involves working in close partnerships with executives to reap the benefits such as those described within this paper.

Visit the website at www.hrweb.co.uk for more details about the services we can provide or call us to discuss your requirements.