

TAKE THE RIDE

Coaching has been around long enough and is sufficiently ingrained in many organisations to prove wrong those who dismissed it as a 'fad'. But is a bandwagon starting to roll?

CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development) research suggests that around 87% of companies use some form of coaching to develop their staff. It seems as if almost everyone is employing coaching for personal, career or organisational development – and many who aren't are either wondering if they were wrong to have dismissed it as a fad, or simply don't have a culture of developing their people.

Positive press for coaching over recent years has encouraged increasing numbers of organisations to implement coaching for staff at all levels – from graduate recruits, through specialists and middle managers to board level executives. For the majority, the results have been positive.

As such, coaching can be one of the most effective interventions for development at all levels – and crucially for helping to align or balance personal employee development and organisational goals. That said, if coaching is performed 'for the sake of it', without clear expectations, or by someone inadequately skilled, it is likely to be ineffective and potentially disruptive to employee morale and organisational focus.

The challenge for organisations – or individuals – seeking to benefit from coaching, is to identify the purpose and the appropriate approach and to ensure that those working as coaches – whether internal or external to the company – are competent and understand the context in

which the coaching takes place.

Achieving this requires a significant investment of time and resource as well as commitment from the top. So how do you ensure that you avoid the pitfalls and gain maximum payback for this investment?

As the bandwagon grows so does the potential for 'self-styled' coaches and 'consultants' with little or no experience in broader OD issues to flood the market. An often overlooked but essential feature of a successful programme is to integrate coaching within the broader developmental strategy of the business. Not doing so can be, at best, ineffectual long-term and, at worst, damaging. Also important is defining and making transparent the relationship between coaching and related HR processes and procedures such as appraisals, pay review and performance management, as well as other training and development initiatives.

Programme sponsors should also ensure that barriers and restraints are clearly defined in terms of what the coachee can expect – and the coach is required to deliver. Typically, these may include the following criteria:

- Relationships are confidential and facilitative rather than directive, although the coach will use their knowledge and experience to assist the coachee.
- The remit is usually wider than pure skills development and explores personal strengths, weaknesses, style, aspirations and values in order to enhance self-awareness and lead to

lasting changes in attitude as well as behaviour.

- The process encourages a commitment to measurable actions that have clear organisational as well as personal benefits.

It is essential that the key objectives or expected outcomes are clearly identified and communicated up front, that some means of monitoring progress and measuring outcomes are integrated into the programme. This is not to say that outcomes need to be quantitative. Far from it. Qualitative or behavioural measures are often more effective for identifying how coaching plays its part in supporting the achievement of broader quantitative goals.

Organisations also need to pay close attention to whom they employ as coaches, whether internal or external – and take the right approach for each individual. Key options include:

Manager as coach. Arguably, all managers should coach their staff and coaching is now often seen as a core management competence. This is a powerful approach but with inherent conflict between the role of the manager who has 'line' responsibilities and the role of 'coach', which is neutral and supportive.

Contracting external professional coaches. Often appropriate to support culture change initiatives and to work with senior executives or those in specialist roles, the executive coach should bring expert skills, an ability to understand context and an objectivity not available in-house.

BUT AVOID THE

Employing dedicated internal coaches. Performing a similar role to the external coach, this is often an effective – and lower cost – approach but may not always be appropriate at board level due to perceived hierarchies or need for total confidentiality.

In essence, it ensures that each individual receives the 'right' coaching at the 'right' time – within a supportive organisational culture.

Coaching is not a panacea and it is well to be wary of those who claim it is. The bandwagon may be rolling but for those that avoid the 'one size fits all for immediate and total business and personal success' and implement well-designed and executed coaching programmes, the outcome in terms of personal, career and organisational development can be truly transformational.

Factors for success

Schemes should and do vary depending on needs – and are strongly influenced by



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The Coaching & Mentoring Network is the UK's leading independent and free information resource dedicated to coaching and mentoring – including news, events, published articles, on-line referral service, discussion forum and links to useful resources.

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organisational culture – but scheme sponsors or co-ordinators should pay attention to:

- Identifying coaching competencies that support either the existing or desired organisational culture
- Benchmarking core coaching competencies against accepted professional standards
- Developing processes and procedures

that support the new programme and culture

- Redesigning jobs so that the coaching function is integrated into roles and responsibilities and awarded sufficient time and priority
- Selecting and training to ensure that internal coaches are suited to the role in terms of attitude, emotional maturity and motivation
- Assessing skills to ensure that coaches are competent in the first instance and undertake appropriate ongoing development.
- Ensuring that coaches understand their responsibilities, limitations and boundaries.
- Defining and communicating how coaching fits with other performance management and development initiatives
- Setting in place systems for monitoring, measuring and recording the effectiveness of the programme at both the individual relationship level and as programme wide.

Benefits to individual and company include:

- Improving company revenues and profits
- Enhancing operational efficiency
- Developing employee morale and motivation
- Increasing employee productivity particularly through developing soft skills
- Providing clear thinking space to gain clarity and fresh perspectives
- Leveraging organisational culture change
- Career progression and succession planning
- Creating cultures and environments which promote loyalty and reduce staff turnover

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