

Coaching and How to Use it to Carry the Benefits of Training Back into the Business

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Management and Trainer Briefing

One of the key issues pre-occupying learning and development managers is how to carry the benefits of training back into the business. One of the ways to do this is through executive coaching. This blog explains how.

1 How does coaching add value?

Follow-up personal coaching for delegates on a training course face-to-face or on the phone helps personalise the training. It enables the participants to embed the results of the training and the coaching in their daily business.

For individuals it offers the opportunity to deal with personal issues at work privately. Coaching should aim to help develop the individual manager for better performance, new jobs or for promotion.

For the trainer/coach it offers greater insight into the participants and their business and the opportunity to earn extra income from the training.

2 What are the criteria in choosing a coach?

In my view there are three: - empathy, experience and education. Of these by far the most important is the ability to empathise with the participant and to listen sympathetically to what they have to say. Experience of coaching and of the company is a second criterion. The more you know the better you are able to support. Third, education. In many cases this means having a coaching qualification.

In general corporate coaching, a coaching qualification is useful but maybe not a must. Experience and empathy are much more important. I'm afraid to say that some of the coaches, but not all, that I have dealt with have notably lacked empathy and experience. Their carefully

cultivated professional detachment has often been alienating rather than inspiring. To check what training is available, visit the ICF International Coach Federation website <http://www.coachfederation.org/>

3 Are coaching and mentoring the same?

No. Coaching is a defined activity with a clear beginning and end. It may be repeated but it should have a clear beginning and end. Mentoring is defined by need rather than time. The mentor's job is to be available to induct a new member into the company. It may also be to help the mentee's progress in the company. A mentor is likely to be internal. A coach is more likely to be external.

One of the most famous mentor/mentee relationships is in Japanese corporations where a senpai (mentor) often quite unofficially takes on the role of guidance to a younger kohai (mentee). It is a highly honoured relationship.

4 What are the conditions for successful coaching?

Regularity, regularity, regularity. The coachee should agree to a fixed number of sessions (maybe 1 hour or 90 minutes, sometimes less) at a regular agreed time. This should be honoured as rigidly as possible. Irregular sessions when the manager happens to be available just will not work.

Normally, the coachee will call you. However, make sure you have the coachee's email and direct phone number so that you can remind them if necessary.

5 Phone or face-to-face or skype?

The first meeting, if at all possible, should be face-to-face. That face-to-face meeting may be part of the training session. If so, don't leave it too long before starting the phone coaching. A month to six weeks is the ideal. If you adopt a six-session coaching programme, session 1 should be face-to-face and sessions 2-6 should be on the phone. Some coaches like to end the coaching programme with a final face-to-face meeting, if at all possible.

Skype combines voice and visual communication but managers in offices may not have access to it.

6 How long should a coaching programme last?

I would suggest a six session coaching of which the first session, and perhaps others, should be face to face. Each session might be an hour to ninety minutes long. It is terribly important that regularity of contact is honoured. Remember, an important priority for the coachee is to book a private room where they can speak freely, away from colleagues and managers. This may only be available at certain times.

7 What qualities does an effective coach need?

Empathy and the ability to listen. It is important to listen, explore all options and not jump in with instant solutions, however tempting. Apart from listening, the greatest skill is the ability to ask questions. If every suggestion you want to make can be turned into an open question it will work much better. The important thing is to ask questions to allow the coachee to find the answer to questions and problems him or herself.

The phrases 'tell me', appealing to feelings, 'How do you feel about that?' and similar open questions are important ways of opening up the coachee.

8 What techniques can you use in coaching?

Techniques vary from coach to coach and from situation to situation. What I do after a training session is go through the following checklist.

- **JOB:** -How are you? What if anything has changed since we met on the training course? (job description, reporting lines, international responsibilities)
- **TRAINING COURSE:** -How has the training course helped you? What have you been able to implement? Have you been able to brief your boss, departmental colleagues on what you learned? What was the result?
- **PROBLEMS:** - Any problems you are facing which we can discuss?

- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** - Use the GROW method (Goals, Reality, Options (obstacles and opportunities), and Way Forward) to explore career opportunities, professional development and next steps. The GROW model was developed by Sir John Whitmore. To find out more visit www.what-is-coaching.com/grow-coaching-model.html

One company asks the coachees to report back on what they achieved from the coaching.

9 What constraints on coaching are there?

- **Money:** - Coaching as an individual activity is not especially expensive but coaching in bulk for a lot of managers can be. This is why the demand for coaching in SME's is fairly limited.
- **Seniority:** - Managers, especially overseas, may worry about hierarchy and respect and be resistant to the idea of being coached by someone who is less senior than they are.
- **Privacy:** - We have mentioned this before. Access to a private phone is essential for people to speak freely about their problems and aspirations.
- **Stubbornness:** - Some coaches are not open to open discussion. They simply want to ask and get answers to specific questions. This is one function of coaching but not the only one. It is not even the most important one.

10 How can coaching work?

Commitment is the key.

It needs commitment from HR management and business units. It is an extra cost on the training budget and needs to demonstrate practical results. Therefore record keeping, reporting and following progress is important.

It also needs commitment from coachees. They have to see the value of it and also feel their needs are being met.

Finally, it needs commitment from you. Coaching is not an academic exercise. It is your opportunity to help the company improve performance and develop its talent.

It is also your chance to help a manager to achieve personal and organisational potential.

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