

Coaching... but does it work... really ?

This is the final article in this series on coaching. Just to refresh your memory, this is what we have covered.

Myths Debunked...in the first article we covered exactly what the truth is about coaching, what it is, and what it isn't, where it's used and how. We then followed that with some ideas on how you might structure your coaching function in an organisation – develop your own team of coach, or contract external coaches, or both.

We gave you some insights into the type of questions you need to ask a potential coach or coach training provider. Coaching models were discussed and what makes these models so powerful. In the first article, I said that coaching is about helping people think more clearly, and, most importantly, it's about getting results. Today we complete this series with two real New Zealand case studies.

-- Gai Foskett

1. A large Australasian financial services organisation decided to train a group of sales managers to be internal coaches. The training was over a period of 12 weeks consisting of three face-to-face training days, and 8 x 1 hour teleclasses. The programme commenced in September 2003.

Towards the end of the training, managers were encouraged to start coaching at least one staff member.

A sales manager who had been in his current role for six years was one of those managers selected to go through coach training. His first subject after the training was a manager of a small branch within the business who was struggling within his role. He was achieving approximately 70-80 percent of the business targets he needed to meet.

Using a structured approach to describe what coaching is, how it works, and a robust goal-setting process meant a solid coaching relationship was established. The coached manager identified three goals – two personal and one work-related.

The coach manager says: "Initially, I was a bit concerned that there was more focus on personal than work, after all, this was 'work place' coaching. However, it wasn't long before I noticed a clear improvement in the coachee's performance and results – as his personal life improved around health, fitness and family, so too did his thinking and performance at work. I always knew this at a logical level, but seeing this happen and noticing the difference in the manager at an

emotional level, was quite an insight for me as a manager."

Bottom line

The changes were: the bottom line. The branch results went from underachieving by 20-30 percent to exceeding 100 percent of targets. The branch staff went from having little direction to being a focused and motivated team of people. The coached manager started sharing a little more of 'himself' and also starting using the skills he noticed his own coach using with him. Skills such as powerful goal setting, putting in specific plans to achieve the goals, and staying focused on those actions each day and week to achieve the goals.

The coached manager became one of the area's top performers and was then promoted to a larger branch where he continues to deliver the results required by the organisation. He also continues to enjoy a much more balanced, healthier and satisfying personal life.

While this is an example of what can happen in a structured series of coaching, the coach manager uses his coaching skills in his everyday interaction and tasks as a sales manager.

As the coach manager describes:



“Using the coaching skills impacted everywhere in my work – in meetings, with other staff or peers. Using the communication and feedback skills, I was able to help staff clarify what was going on, what needed to change, and focus on the solutions. The key difference was that the staff were given the space/thinking time and the support to develop their own solutions rather than have me tell them what to do. The effect of this has been that they ‘own the solution’ and they pursue it.”

Positive impact

There has been a very positive impact for coach manager himself. Being a goal setter by habit anyway, he found the coach training, and then coaching others to clarify goals, really enhanced his own goal setting. He created much more clearly defined goals, and specific plans to achieve them: again, not just in the workplace, but also in his personal life.

“I struggled for years with my fitness and health levels, just didn’t stick to my goals. By creating much more specific goals and having plans to keep them alive, I have changed this. For the last year I have been going to the gym four days a week.”

He adds: “The impact this has had on my performance as a manager has been that I am committing to and achieving the goals I am setting within my own work environment. Through the achievement of specific goals, I feel I have made a greater contribution to the organisation by adding more value.”

Other insights that the coach manager has around implementing coaching in the workplace are:

- Select your coaching subject carefully – not everyone is open to coaching, nor does everyone necessarily want to improve or change. The coached needs to be committed to the whole process.
- Communicate – clearly communicate at the outset what coaching is, how it works, what it is, what the benefits could be. Discuss how confidential the content of the coaching will be.
- Stick to it – as a coach, ensure you are disciplined and stick to the process of goal setting, reviewing actions and progress, have regular scheduled meetings and stick with them (sometimes a challenge with all the other necessary and some unnecessary ‘noise’ of a manager’s role).
- Gain the coached’s trust early on; share a little about yourself as a coach, and as a human being.
- Most common goal areas are health, family, relationships, financial and then of course, the work goals.

Set benchmarks

When training managers as coaches, set benchmarks of how many coaching series a manager/coach is expected to run each year. Keep coaches accountable to that. Select managers to be trained as coaches carefully – not everyone will be suited to the role as a coach.

Base your selection criteria on the key qualities of a coach – committed to others, being open to coaching themselves, confident, integrity, insightful and being a great communicator.

Another perspective ...

(from the coach manager’s direct manager): “We were looking for a programme to lift and develop our sales managers that would take them to a new level and open them up to a more focused way of managing and coaching. In my view, the programme delivered this.”

Other observed changes in individuals across his region are:

- being more confident;
- taking control of their roles and career;
- achieving daily results;
- being more focused and being better at their role;
- presenting themselves in a far better light than before.

“Feedback has been positive. The most common has been that the staff have really appreciated the process, allowing a focus on their personal life as well as their work life.”

(You might recall in the last issue I talked about the area of Generation X vs Y vs Baby Boomers. Gen X and Y, to a degree, have different expectations and values when it comes to being managed. There is high expectation today from these people that companies and managers will respect their whole lives, not just resources for work. In other words, it’s that old work/life balance catch cry – and it is real.)

“The challenge with taking the programme into an organisation was ensuring that it supported and fit with other leadership and development programmes. After the training and coaching was in practice, the challenge then became how to roll it out across a complex



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organisation with hundreds of staff. If I was doing this all again tomorrow, I would probably now focus more on training managers in team coaching.”

Team coaching is another option you have in rolling out coaching and establishing it as a key management tool.

2 Auckland based coach, Linley Rose, PCC, of Coaching Associates (www.coachingassociates.co.nz). *Worked with a senior manager in the school education system.*

The client wanted to balance her life and clarify and pursue her ‘dream job’.

The key challenges and issues were that she wasn’t getting any spare time to see friends and family, keep fit, look at future planning, or complete projects at home. Her focus was on work-related activities, and fun and her social life just did not happen.

She saw the career goal (the dream job) issue as a personal relationship conflict with a senior colleague.

Although feeling daunted, the coached clarified the current reality – you will recall that as being a key step in the coaching for change model in the last issue. This first step allowed her to see and acknowledge the many successes and strengths to build on.

These enhanced a strong desire to achieve future outcomes she had purposely designed. The big shifts were not just saying she was responsible for the outcomes, but seeing tangible ways she could actually do that. Some early successes were significant here.

This current reality work set the platform for deeper enquiry which led to exploring values – what they were, how they fitted and where.

While she thought her staff shared her vision and values for

the workplace, she realised she hadn’t checked that out or communicated it. This led to some very powerful leadership team meetings with her staff.

Biggest insight

The biggest insight was that the key work relationship was more about a mismatch in vision and values than personal dislikes on either side.

The change areas were around eliminating emotional responses, seeking new ways of asking, developing muscles to be able to say clearly what she wanted and didn’t want. The outcome was guilt-free time with girlfriends, a specially focused time with her two children, a holiday alone and her partner’s full support for doing things differently.

She learned to be much kinder to herself and not be her own worst critic. She learned she was a role model with integrity and that she was contributing much to the key relationships in her life. She also learned that there is time for a balanced life, but it is up to her to take charge and watch for the triggers of old habits. Goal-setting

pays dividends, and going for what she wants really matters. She was empowered by the process, changed the ways in which she thought about her work and her staff, and now has the dream job she identified during the coaching.

The role of the coach is to facilitate positive change faster than it might happen otherwise. It is about helping people think more clearly and differently to achieve their goals – be they business or personal. With a well-trained coach and a good match to the coached, coaching works.

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