

Myths debunked:

Coaching: it's got to be good for you

Coaching specialist Gai Foskett sets out to debunk the many myths surrounding coaching in the workplace.

Over the next few issues she will delve into various areas of the subject:

- Internal vs external coaches — what would suit your organisation best?
- Robust coaching models — when deciding on a coaching company or a coach, it's important to clarify what models will be used.
- What to look for in a coach — when employing external coaches, what questions do you ask?
- The process of coaching — how does it work?
- How is it different from managing?



Myth 1: Coaching is for wimps

So you think it's all a bit wishy washy? New agey? Touchy feely? Without clearly defined outcomes from a coaching programme, you might be right. As Alice in Wonderland was told: "If you don't know where you want to go, then it doesn't matter where you end up."

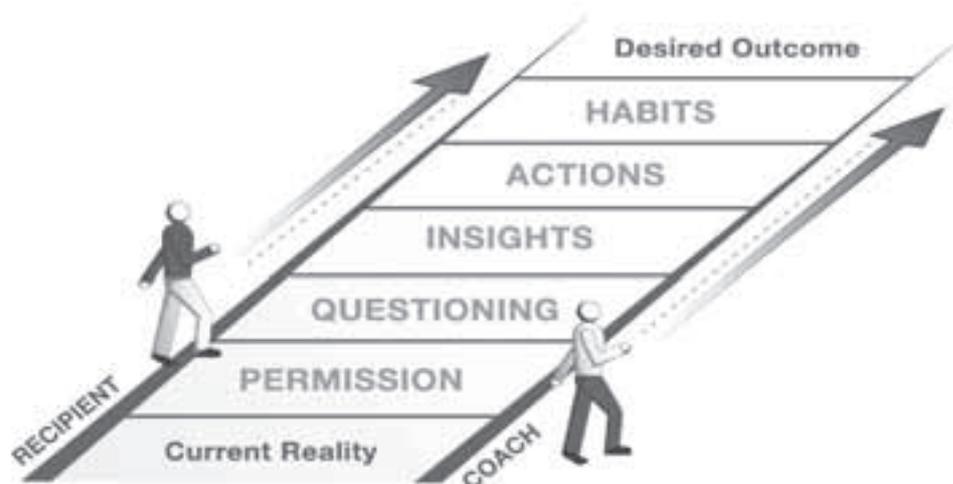
With a well-structured programme and clearly defined and measurable goals or outcomes, coaching is anything but for wimps. Being a coach takes your human skills - listening, communicating, and thinking to a whole new level. Being coached not only gives you new ways to think about issues, but you also learn about your emotional self (what is known as emotional intelligence) - the foundations for effective leadership.

A well-trained coach will have the courage and skills to offer powerful feedback and the learner will feel open to receiving and learning from it. Not a wimpy thing to do at all! Coaching is important. According to a 2002 survey of 280 leading UK companies, 93 percent of managers believe that coaching should be available to all employees, regardless of seniority.

Myth 2: Coaching is only a perk for high achievers.

Having spent many years as a senior manager in a large organisation I understand how 'alone' one can feel. It is the knowledge that you are responsible for delivering on the business targets and strategies for the year.

The managing director or CEO is not concerned too much about the detail behind your achievements: in other words, your line manager is not holding you accountable to your creative ideas and so they go in the 'round tuit' file — the one growing fatter each month! Where high achievers are really 'flying' with coaching, is where their thinking is stretched and challenged to further levels. The difference is having a coach holding them accountable to their ideas.



Myth 3: Coaching is for under-performers

Poor performance means different things to different people. When you consider coaching and your organisation, what is your thinking about it? What questions do you currently ask of the 'poor performer'? How do you promote and talk about coaching in your organisation? If someone isn't performing, there is usually some underlying reason: lack of motivation or basic skills, lack of focus, unclear goals and objectives. Questioning and challenging are at the heart of good coaching and used effectively can win over even the poorest of performers.

I was employed to coach someone described as 'underperforming'. My role was to coach him to achieve his targets — which he did — but he was also the recipient of some envy as his new thinking and people skills became evident in a real way: results! Also for him, increased dollars in the pocket. He already had the technical skills to do the job, but through coaching he changed his attitude, optimism and thinking about his work and career.

Myth 4: Coaching doesn't fit our culture

OK, so what is your culture? How would you describe the culture of your organisation?

- bureaucratic;
- customer focused;
- flexible;
- reactive?

What attributes of your culture do you want to grow? What are the attributes in which you would like to create change in?

An organisation which has a 'coaching' culture is one where the people of that organisation:

- are empowered to make decisions;
- have the skills to give and receive useful and empowering feedback;
- have high levels of emotional intelligence present in the workplace each day, each meeting, each conversation.

What difference would that make in your culture?

According to Quantum Market Research, 2003: "Good working relationships with the boss and other workers came out second of the top three factors influencing their performance."

Coaching creates the synergy between employees that allows a culture to really work.

Myth 5: We don't have time to introduce coaching into our organisation

Coaching saves you time. Coaching is developing great future leaders by requiring them to make others great. Do you have time for that?

Myth 6: Our HR strategy is working well thanks...

Is that like 'if it's not broke, don't fix it'? Coaching is not about fixing something that is not working; it's about identifying what is working really well, building on that to then raise the bar. It's about learning to think about things differently to ensure your strategies are always working well...being perhaps, one step ahead.

Myth 7: Coaching is just the latest fad...

So it's a passing fancy? The reality is that effectively-structured coaching is all about creating permanent and positive change. Be very clear about the outcomes you want from a coaching initiative and stay committed to it. Coaching delivers lasting change and is a global movement with over 30,000 coaches in over 30 countries during 2004. It's part of the \$100 billion training and development field.

Myth 8: Coaching is for managers who don't know how to manage...

Managers competently trained as coaches have been incredulous about changes in the people they manage, when they employ their coaching skills.

Comments such as: "I have been managing this person for years and in a few weeks I have learned more about this person than I ever knew before...our conversations now are so rich and I now understand more about how this person works best."

Alternatively, feedback from managers I have coached has often been that they are far more aware of their own behaviour and the impact it has on their staff and productivity. In other words, the coaching process builds a new level of awareness — emotional intelligence. Coaching takes management to another level.

Now we've blown the myths, here is the reality...there are various options to consider when bringing coaching into your organisation — either by bringing in external coaches or training your own managers/staff to be competent coaches — or both.

Coaching — what it is

Coaching is the art of bringing out the greatness in people. So what?

Good question.

At the recent HRINZ conference in Wellington, I spoke to dozens and dozens of HR professionals and was constantly amazed at the different interpretations each person had of coaching. In my view as a professional coach, and coach trainer, some were sort of right, but many had a view based on the myths just (hopefully) debunked.

Here's the bottom line: Coaching is about getting results. Coaching is about getting the best possible return on investment from one of your most valuable assets — your people.

Interested? Thought you might be.

So, just what IS coaching, and how could your organisation benefit ?

There are two human beings involved in the coaching relationship: the coach who is being paid to provide the coaching (an external coach or an appropriately trained internal coach) and the person being coached. Coaching is about having someone available for the learner to learn with.

It's about providing a structure and environment for a person to clarify what their desired change or outcome is, (their goals) develop a logical plan to achieve it, identify steps to get into action.

Yes, of course, your managers are doing that right? Maybe.

There are five important principles of powerful coaching:

Results coaching is based on these underlying principles (Results Coaching Systems):

Self-directed learning

Coaching supports people to come up with their own answers rather than directing or advising. The person being coached is the expert in their career and their life — they know the answers. The coach does not provide specific advice or opinions. Instead they use a questioning approach to help the recipient find their own answers.

Solutions focus

Coaching is not about what's wrong and trying to fix it. It is a completely different approach to human

learning. It focuses firmly on solutions — where you are now, where you want to be and how you can get there. Focusing on the solutions gives you a very different result to taking apart the problem.

Positive feedback

Criticism, of which we get large amounts each year from others and ourselves, tends to shrink our confidence and stop us taking action. Encouragement and belief does the opposite. Coaching delivers encouragement that really moves people forward.

Systematic approach to delivering behavioural change

Real change takes time, commitment and focus. Coaching is effective because it provides a step-by-step and systematic approach that slowly produces real change.

Stretch

People perform at their best when they are appropriately challenged. Too much stretch causes stress; too little produces boredom. But how much stretch is just right? Most people do not challenge themselves. In coaching, we focus on empowering the individual to develop their own answers, maintain a firm focus on solutions and then challenge them to be the best they can be.

The coach is there as a sounding board to bring out the best in people through a process of:

- setting goals;
- developing strategies;
- getting into action;
- maintaining momentum;
- providing accountability;
- keeping the focus on the big picture;
- building on strengths and reducing weaknesses;
- delivering honest feedback;

Some tips when measuring ROI for coaching:

1. Measure any result that is meaningful.
2. Recognise that not everything you measure will be objective.
3. Clearly define the most important results a leader or manager can actually influence or achieve.
4. Align your business plans and outcomes for coaching with the learner's personal development plan.

In closing, consider this...

Employees are four times more likely to leave a job with a manager who has poor coaching and interpersonal skills (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Often managers are hired because of their technical skills and experience and fired because of their lack of leadership ability.

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