Internal or external coaches ?

Matching coach and needs essential

Managers today have more pressure than ever to get results from their teams, and yet often they are promoted through job specific expertise: they know how to get the job done, but they may not have the people and management skills to match.

In the workplace, managers that truly have effective coaching skills produce significantly better results. People do better work, for longer, and contribute to the organisation in many more ways. Companies that have brought in a coaching culture report significantly reduced staff turnover, increased productivity, greater happiness and satisfaction at work.

In the last issue, we debunked some of the myths around coaching. Perhaps over our long holiday you have been wondering whether coaching could be useful for your company - but what and how would be the best way to bring coaching into your organisation?

Naturally, your financial resources might well dictate the pace and structure of a coaching initiative. However, for this article we'll look at the two main structures - developing your own internal coaches, and contracting external coaches.

An 'internal' coach as defined within this article is an employee, usually in a manager/team leader position, who has been appropriately trained as a coach. An 'external' coach is an independent professional coach contracted to coach specific groups or individuals.

Internal coaches

Probably the first consideration is to establish what you want to change or achieve through having your own internal coaches; find your focus. As you can see from figure 1, coaching can provide support and development in a number of different (management) levels and areas. Induction, transition and performance coaching can all be delivered effectively by appropriately trained internal coaches. (Leadership coaching is often best delivered by external coaches - we'll discuss this later.)

As you start to research the market for coach training providers, satisfy yourself that the school is delivering robust, well-structured coach training, and is delivered by professional trainers who are also qualified coaches themselves.

The training should be centred around the core competencies as defined by the International Coach Federation (ICF). The ICF is the major global coaching organisation and recognised by most serious coach training schools and providers. Check it out on: www.coachfederation.org

If possible, meet the trainers and talk to other client companies who have bought their coach training.

Whoever you choose to deliver this training, there will be work to be done by you first - think about these factors:

Who would you put through a coach training initiative?

How would coach training fit in with previous, existing or planned training and development initiatives?

How would coaching be used in your organisation? To meet sales targets, as a performance management tool, in staff reviews, in the achievement of corporate or department goals, to increase communication, to develop management skills, or to deliver a specific change programme.

What kind of culture do you have in your organisation now? Authoritative? Fun? Reactive? Bureaucratic? Solutions-focused?
The list is endless.

How would you like the company culture to change as a result of a coaching initiative?

What specific outcomes would you like from having your team of internal coaches? Should managers be able to communicate better and staff have a better work/life balance?

What are your potential challenges in introducing coaching?

How would you know if coaching was working? Taking the time to really clarify what you want from having a team of internal coaches will allow you to ensure the coach training itself is structured accordingly. Many coach training providers will assist you in this part of the process.

Getting the coaches into action

There needs to be a comfortable match between a

coach and the coached. I have been involved in a number of coach training initiatives, both as a coach, and as a coach trainer. The most successful programmes have been preceded by thinking through how the company will use the coaches, and how you will 'match' your coaches.

Some companies use their trained coaches across departments/divisions. This not only spreads the coaching culture quicker, but it is also likely to avoid any 'agenda' that a line manager might be perceived to have if coaching their own staff.

Coaching can be set up as a 'series' over a number of months to achieve specific goals, with planned one-on-one coaching sessions each week or fortnight.

As well as having a formal coaching structure in place, the trained coach manager can also use their coaching skills in all of their interpersonal dealings - this is where managers are really experiencing a new level of engagement and commitment from their staff. That is, coaching conversations are taking place, as against a manager making decisions for their staff.

These conversations see the trained coach (manager) use their coaching skills and qualities to empower staff, stretch them, provide useful feedback and so on.

If you do choose to develop your own team of internal coaches, ongoing development and support needs to be provided to those coaches. This might take the form of regular group mentoring meetings, ongoing coach training, and working with a coach themselves.

External coaches

Generally speaking, companies are inclined to contract external coaches for the more senior managers in the organisation. The focus is often on leadership development, and major change - but not always! Many senior executives I have personally coached have been as focused on regaining their own health and family relationships (work/life balance) as they have been on achieving specific strategic goals.

Figure 1

Again, as you would expect, being clear about the desired outcomes from contracting an external coach is a key success factor. Some senior executives prefer to find and select their own coach, while other organisations might create a panel of coaches from which an executive can choose.

Setting up relationships, expectations and boundaries is a must! Figure 2 (next page) reflects the different relationships that might be impacted when a manager is being coached. As with all coaching relationships, the content of the sessions is confidential. Therefore it must be agreed as to how and what information is shared outside those sessions.

In my experience, a very basic report from the coach to the sponsor (if that is a different person to the one being coached) is all that is ideally required - information such as sessions being attended and engaged in, tasks being completed, progress towards goals (specific company related goals) etc. The client, not the coach, raises any issues arising from coaching sessions that should be raised or managed elsewhere.

This allows the coach to remain agenda-free and maintain the clarity of distance that an effective coach must have.

Using external coaches - the process

1. Familiarisation of client company culture.
2. Company selects a team of qualified coaches (depending on numbers required).
3. Introductory presentations to key stakeholders.
4. Managers choose a coach.
5. Coach and client meet to ensure compatibility and develop goals.
6. Goals are signed off by the organisation (or as agreed prior to this step).
7. Coaching commences.
8. Coach reports to account manager to monitor targets and outcomes.
9. Account manager reports to organisation on completion or as agreed.

The types of organisations hiring external coaches: organisations that promote accountability;

organisations willing to invest in their people;

organisations committed to staff development;

organisations that value well balanced staff;

The sectors hiring the most coaches include IT, professional services, banking, finance and telecommunications.

Organisations are hiring coaches to:

help achievers get to the next level; facilitate greater work/life balance; improve individual leadership skills;reward high performing staff; deal with pressure after a merger or down-sizing; deal with under-performers; help a team achieve its goals.

What structure suits best?

The larger corporates are well placed and probably best served by developing their own teams of internal coaches. The pace at which this is achieved will depend in large part

on the financial resources available to commit to training and supporting the new coaches, and, of course, support at the most senior levels.

Without doubt, the best way for senior executives to understand the impact coaching can have, is to experience it themselves - in which case the starting point could be for an external coach to work with them initially. In my experience, where a 'sponsor' of a coaching initiative has worked with their own coach, they are much more informed, and passionate about driving the initiative.

The speed with which coaching is accepted as a fundamental of a company's culture will depend on the level of commitment a company has to it. If coaching is seen as an 'extra task' for management to 'get done' then they've missed the point! Coaching - as a way of managing, communicating, growing the business and the people is not an extra task for managers to do - it becomes the way they manage.

As with any change, it requires commitment at all levels and a robust support structure in place - and clearly defined outcomes.

At the other end of the market, for smaller to medium size firms (the majority of the New Zealand economy), starting with an external coach to coach key managers can be a high impact cost-effective way forward.

Other options might be to utilise the offering of public coach training courses (as against in-house specifically tailored to your organisation).

In the next issue we will discuss what to look for when deciding on coach training, or selecting a coach.

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Quotes of note

Challenge in leadership is to move from success to significance - Francis Hesselbien.

People are being crushed by pressure and not able to act on experience - Margaret Wheatley.

Being great means being passionate, wanting to be the best in the world, knowing what drives your resource or economic engine - Jim Collins.

Transformational leaders may be overvalued - Neville Bain.

ROI is vitally important , that means Return on Integrity not Return on Investment - Lynn Brewer.

Supplied by Alastair Rylatt.

FOUND ANY NEW MEMBERS *Lately?*

Coaching relationships

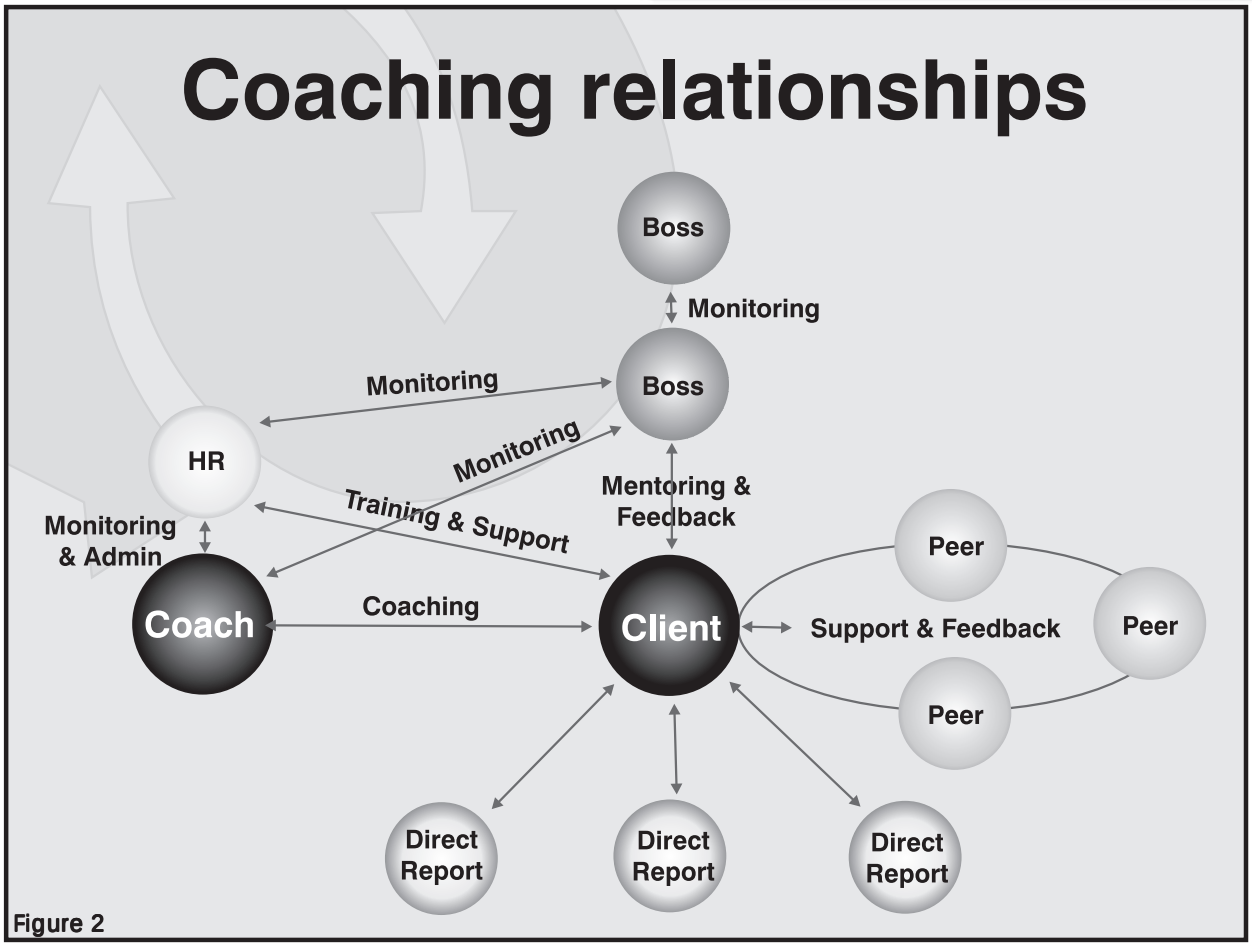

Figure 2