

What do you want in a coach ?

One of the challenges faced when employing external coaches is knowing what questions to ask. Coaching as a profession is still developing, and consequently there are few universally reliable credentials.

Six major factors should be considered when looking to employ an external coach to work with your managers, staff and leaders.

Experience - how long has the coach been a professional coach? Many coaches come from disciplines such as counselling, consulting and so on... this is not coaching. So check the person's tenure as a coach.

Training - ask the coach to describe the specifics of their coach training. What was the school; check them out on how the training was delivered - were the ICF core competencies trained, was there an assessment process? What ongoing development does the coach receive to ensure their coaching skills are well honed and they are up to date with the latest in global coaching trends?

Structure - well trained coaches will be able to articulate the structure of a coaching session and series. They should be able to explain the different methodologies they might use, and the models they are based around. Structure and focus allows progress. However, with the right structure and models, a coach should still be highly skilled at 'being in the moment' with the client.

This does not mean a coaching session is ad hoc, but it does mean that the coach has the confidence, skills and intuition to know how to be flexible while still staying focused.

Specialty - has the coach specialised in any particular area? For example, training is available from some schools for a coach to specialise in coaching small business owners, or coaching within a complex corporate environment (executive coaching). Also, if you are considering using an external coach for team or group coaching, check what training they have had in this area.

Qualifications - what other qualifications does the coach have? If a coach has qualifications in say, psychology, or background as a CEO, they may indeed be very well suited to the role for your organisation - or, because they have maybe a similar background to those they will coach, it might be less appropriate.

The key factors to check for are less tangible. For example, acute perception, sound judgment, diplomacy and integrity should be on your list of qualities to check for when doing your reference checks. Perhaps the most important qualifications are character and insight, distilled as much from the coach's personal experience as from formal training. Pay close attention to chemistry and the matching of

coach to those receiving the coaching.

Whatever you are looking to develop in your people to be coached, look for that quality in the coach. Do they have what you want? Do they walk the talk themselves?

Client references - ask your coach to provide references from both those they have coached, and client companies they have worked for as a coach. Get permission to ring those referees and ensure you ask the things you need to ask, e.g:

- what was the outcome from the coaching - both measurable in business terms, as well as at a personal level?
- did they achieve their desired outcomes?
- what particular strengths did the coach bring?
- what did the coach have that made them choose that coach?
- would they contract them again as an external coach?

This is all quite basic stuff, and it's just the stuff that I see overlooked quite often in the workplace coaching arena. For example, an organisation I have intimate knowledge of was looking for a coach and coach trainer - after a rather weak analysis of what was on offer in the market place, the organisation decided on a sales trainer to deliver one on one coaching, and coach training!

Why? Simply because he was already contracted on sales training work.

What happened? A lot of money was spent and virtually no coaching skills were learned, practiced or supported.

What to look for in coach training programmes

If building your own internal team of coaches is your preferred strategy, then here are some key questions (You will, not surprisingly, notice some duplication between this and the first section of this article):

with Gai Foskett

The school - what is its history?
How long has it been training coaches?
How many has it trained?
What assessment processes are in place for their trainers, And for trainees?
Are there resources, perhaps New Zealand or world-wide, to support your coach training and development needs if you have a large complex organisation?

Models - what models are trained and how was the model developed?
How up to date is the training with the latest global coaching trends and thinking?
What is the purpose of each of the models?

ICF alignment - is the training aligned to the ICF core competencies?
This could be important if you wish to have ICF-credentialed coaches longer term.

Success/ROI - what clients can you talk to?
How did those client companies measure the success of the coach training, and coach development in their organisation?
What worked for them? What could have worked better?

Ongoing support - once your managers have been trained as coaches, what ongoing support is available?

Assessment - does the school offer an assessment for your workplace coaches?

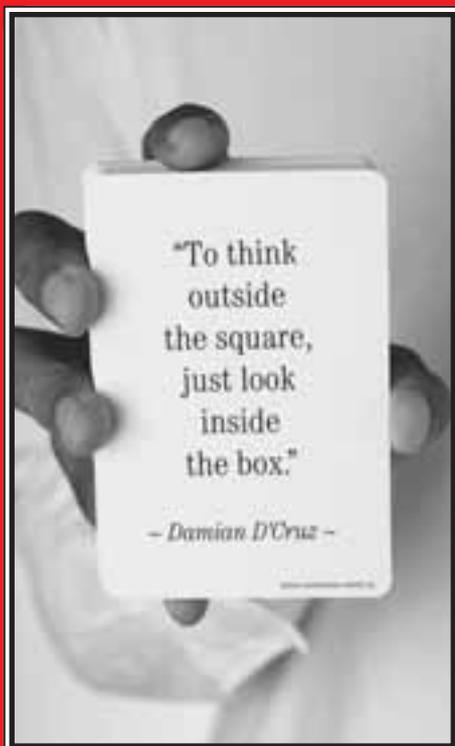
Ability to tailor - each organisation is different and may need to tailor its own programme to suit business structures, geographic locations, culture, size and so on.

Coaching, when provided in the workplace context, is fundamentally a business proposition. Its purpose is to produce learning, behavioral change, and growth in the coached, for the economic benefit of a third party - the employer of the coached. On a personal level its purpose is to help the coached lead better lives. Coaching succeeds only when that benefit comes in addition to business results. Time spent asking the right questions of a potential coach and clarifying what your specific and measurable outcomes are will go a long way to achieving your business results.

The International Coach Federation is a global coach organisation with the purpose of developing and growing the profession and use of professional coaches world-wide. There are three levels of credentials available through the ICF. However, this does not mean that if a coach does not have ICF credentials, they are not a powerful and professional coach. You can read more about the details of the ICF credentials at www.coachfederation.org.

In this series, to date, we have debunked the common myths surrounding coaching, and the second article talked about what form the coaching platform might take - internal coaches or external coaches, or maybe a mix of both. Today, you moved closer to some of the detail to look for when selecting coaches. In the next article, we'll cover the process of coaching - how does it work? How is it different from managing?

If you have any specific questions, please e-mail me at: coach@coaching.net.nz



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