


# An effective COACHING CULTURE



It is now commonplace for even the most senior business leaders to employ an external business coach. **David Guile** FIH advises on the best approach to coaching at all levels of your business



**I**very business faces the same vital question: how to develop and retain key personnel, and in particular high flyers. Training programmes are invariably seen as the answer to this question. However many organisations tend to overlook a significant factor - the importance of the so called 'soft stuff.'

The 'soft stuff' includes the attributes of empathy, trust, listening and effective communication, all designed to build a strong and lasting relationship between the employees and the organisation. This approach has been consistently shown to be one of the key factors of a successful organisation with its absence frequently the cause of organisational mediocrity resulting in poor levels of employee engagement and retention.

Long gone are the days when the board knew all the answers and, as a result, employees didn't feel listened

to or valued. Leadership that demonstrates and values the importance of building both a collective and individual relationship with employees through the delivery of the 'soft stuff' will increasingly, I believe, be the differentiator of sustainable excellence.

Creating a coaching culture within an organisation and coaching individuals to fulfil their potential embraces these attributes and can have a significant impact on both the individual and the business.

## **Stronger financial results**

Establishing an effective coaching programme will empower, motivate and strengthen the team while also embedding a culture of learning and professional development. A recent study from the International Coaching Federation & The Human Capital Institute showed that within organisations with a strong coaching culture, employees were more engaged and the business produced stronger financial





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## Goals that stretch and challenge

An internal coaching programme can be led by line managers on a day-to-day basis to support and develop the team. In order to create a coaching culture within a business, here are some simple yet effective steps to start the coaching process:

- Identify and agree on an area which needs to be developed in order to benefit the individual and the business.
- Agree on a concrete goal or objective. Once articulated, this goal will serve as a yardstick against which to measure progress and a target at which to aim. In order to inspire, a goal has to focus on the future rather than dwell on the past, and it must stretch and challenge while remaining realistic.
- If a goal is unrealistic, it will lead to a loss of hope. If it isn't challenging enough, it won't provide sufficient motivation.
- A successful coach will allow the person being coached time to reflect and space to think.
- Listening is a vital part of successful coaching, but it is more complex and difficult than many people imagine.
- Understanding rather than just hearing is the key. Summarise what you think you've heard in order to confirm genuine understanding. Also try and discuss the things which aren't being said, as well as those which are.
- Ensure the person being coached has fully explained their current situation and how they feel about the areas being focused upon. Discover exactly what the opportunities are, what they feel is holding them back and what solutions have already been tried.
- Open-ended questions are more likely to lead to greater understanding. Questions framed when, what and who are more effective than those based around why and how. The latter may lead to the person being coached feeling challenged and adopting defensive and closed thought patterns.
- Incisive and challenging questions will encourage the recipient to pause, reflect and examine their own thought patterns in a transformative manner.
- Utilise questioning and encouragement to guide the person being coached towards reconsidering the relevant issues and reviewing their options.
- Encourage them to ask what they could have done, what steps they've considered and what they need to do to achieve their stated goals. The fact that they come up with solutions, rather than having answers presented to them, creates a sense of ownership. Use your own experiences to mentor, offering support and advice without being overly judgemental or directive.
- Having been presented with options by the person being coached, review them, and set concrete actions designed to achieve the agreed goal. Gain commitment on when and how these actions will be met, and insist on highly specific answers. If needed, create a challenge by asking what could get in the way of the actions being performed, and discuss relevant solutions to these hurdles.
- Timetable a firm follow-up and review process.
- A good coach will be patient, offer support, listen and build a trusting relationship. The end result of all of this will be to maximise the potential and achievement of the person being coached.

results. Well-planned coaching sessions offer a tailored one-on-one chance to focus on vital areas of personal development, usually areas that have been highlighted at recent appraisals and reviews. These sessions can act as a catalyst to maximise individual potential and performance for the benefit of both the individual and the business.

Coaching is about change and action. It empowers individuals to seize responsibility and develop their personal skills by committing to specific steps which can be measured, and which support their career development. Coaching is flexible. It can take place at all levels of an organisation, in response to the needs of the business. It is now becoming more commonplace for CEOs, MDs and leaders of a business to have a Personal Business Coach which then filters through the business at different levels. Typical areas for coaching include leadership development, achieving objectives, conflict

resolution, and time management.

Coaching can also be invaluable when an individual moves from one role to another, takes on more responsibility, or needs support to enable him or her to get the most out of a wider team of colleagues. Many leaders and organisations use the support of an external qualified Executive Coach to support them to maximise their potential, allowing themselves to take some time out to reflect on priorities and to challenge their own thinking. It also helps to create a culture of coaching within the business. ■

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