

The Emergence of Coaching

Over the past ten years coaching has found a place in the business lexicon. Enter almost any bookshop and you will find at least one book on coaching in the business section. An article on various aspects of coaching appears in the press on, it would seem, a weekly basis. Many people have their coach – in the city of London it has become as obligatory as the Porsche as a status symbol. In many organisations it is no longer enough to be a manager – you must be a coach as well.

There are a number of factors behind the emergence of coaching but this is not the place for that discussion. Suffice to say that the pressures of today's business world have placed a higher demand on individual performance and, increasingly, on learning and that coaching is one way of achieving increases in these areas.

Coaching occurs in the business world in two forms in particular. It appears as Executive Coaching or Performance Coaching. This is typically a one-on-one relationship with a professional from outside the organisation that lasts anything from a few weeks to a year. The other way in which coaching appears is as a critical element of the line-managers role where the manager uses coaching skills to help a subordinate perform, learn and develop. (see The Line-Managers role and the place of Coaching available from The School of Coaching). There is a third, less frequent way in which coaching shows up in the workplace and this is in the form of a tutorial on a single, specific topic, often for an executive who is "too busy" to attend the workshop.

This chapter is concerned with Executive or Performance Coaching as it, arguably, takes its place alongside other more traditional management consulting disciplines. There has been a proliferation of agencies providing these services, either as 'boutique' consultancies, as off-shoots of larger international consultancies and training organisations or as independent coaches. This emergence of coaching is very exciting for the providers but is something of a headache for the buyers. Potential clients are faced with a veritable minefield, splattered with the confusion that might be expected in an emerging discipline. In order to reduce this confusion I offer a definition for coaching, give some examples to show how it can be used in an organization and suggest a number of questions that a potential buyer of coaching services might ask a coach.

The confusion I referred to earlier is sourced in a number of facts:

- the people offering coaching come from a wide variety of different backgrounds; from the psychological and psychotherapeutic disciplines; from training and consultancy; from sport; from 'popular' psychological disciplines and from the business world itself where some chose to engage in a second career in which they share their experience.
- the offerings vary considerably; from programmes lasting a few weeks to those lasting a year or more; from programmes where the content is driven by the providers background to those where it is driven by the needs and interest of the participant
- there are no agreed standards, principles, or ethics. There are for instance quite differing positions on who the client is; is it the person being coached or their employer who is paying the bill? The answer has a major impact on issues such as confidentiality and the information that the employer might want to have access to.

In this scenario it becomes very difficult to choose a coach or even to decide if coaching is the right kind of intervention for the individual or the organisation.

A Definition of Coaching

Given some of the things that I have said earlier in this chapter there are many definitions of coaching. One that has some currency is

“Coaching is the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another.”
(taken from *Effective Coaching* by the author, Orion Business)

Coaching in business must ultimately be concerned with *performance*. If the intervention does not impact on the results that the individual achieves then it is a waste of time, money and effort. This may seem a terribly obvious statement but I know of one blue-chip organisation in particular where, after two years and many hundreds of thousands of pounds the organisation could detect no measureable benefit. A coaching programme must commence with clear performance goals. Such goals may be related to the achievement of business objectives, the execution of a specific project or task or, more generically, greater effectiveness or efficiency. *Learning* is another potential outcome from coaching and is, arguably, at least as important as the immediate performance because it is what future success is dependent upon.

The distinction between learning and *development* is that while you clearly need to learn in order to develop, learning as used here refers to a broader domain of learning such as learning how to approach a new task or process or learning a new skill, while development refers to personal growth and self awareness.

The word *facilitating* is used in this definition to suggest that the person being coached has the capacity to think, to have an insight or creative idea themselves. The role of the coach is to help them explore, to gain a better understanding, to become more aware and from that state to make a better decision than they would have done anyway. It is not the role of the coach to do the thinking for the person being coached.

And then *art*. It is true that there is an emerging ‘science’, some tried and tested approaches, but the notion of art suggests that the experienced coach can move beyond the rules and fully engage with the person being coached, allowing the intuition and imagination of the coach to play an occasional but useful part.

There is a further distinction that is important to understand and this is the distinction between Directive and Non-Directive coaching. Directive coaching means just that; to direct or to instruct. It is what we are most familiar with. Teacher, boss or sports coach, they are the expert and it is their job to impart this expertise to the person being coached. There are clearly times when the coach does know and when their expertise is of use but there are limitations to this approach. The biggest limitation is of course the coach’s knowledge – if they don’t know they cannot help.

Non-Directive coaching is again just that; the coach does not direct, instruct or impart their wisdom. The Non-Directive coach realises that each individual is endowed with an in-built capacity to learn; a learning instinct maybe. For evidence of this look to how you learned to walk. There was no parent there issuing specific instructions and giving directions. The parents rather trust that you will learn for yourself. Unfortunately as the pressure builds (school exams etc) parents forget this and start trying to teach, become more and more judgemental and the inherent pleasure in learning is lost. The Non-Directive Coach trusts in this learning instinct and through careful listening and questioning and the creation of a non-judgemental environment helps the person being coached to think issues through for themselves, come up with new ideas and identify appropriate actions.

Non-Directive coaching has huge benefits. Firstly the process is not limited by the coaches knowledge. I occasionally get to give golf lessons. These are frequently better than the tennis lessons I give – equally occasionally. What may be difficult to grasp about this fact is that while I have been a good tennis player and a qualified tennis coach I have hardly ever hit a golf ball and have no golf teaching accreditation. The capacity of the coach to create an environment in which people can learn is what allows this phenomenon to occur. Usually with remarkable results and a lot of pleasure. A further benefit of the non-directive approach is the confidence that the person being coached gains from the process. They see that they have a capacity to be more effective; that it was their own idea and that ultimately they are not dependent on the coach

Many people profess to operate in a Non-Directive manner, also known as a 'client centred' approach, but I am afraid that very few really do. Either the distinction is not fully appreciated or the coach gets too much satisfaction from solving the problem for others and enjoys the dependency thus generated.

Tim Gallwey in his book *The Inner Game of Work* talks about coaching as something that "must be learned mostly from experience. In the Inner Game approach, coaching can be defined as the facilitation of mobility. It is the art of creating an environment, through conversation and a way of being, that facilitates the process by which a person can move towards desired goals in a fulfilling manner. It requires one essential ingredient that cannot be taught: caring not only for the external result but for the person being coached."

I find the word 'mobility' fascinating. It suggests that the coaching leaves the individual being coached with the capacity to move but makes it clear that the choice to move rest with them.

Before I go on to give some specific example of how coaching can be used in organisation let me say some things about what coaching is not:

- coaching is not the application of psychological or psychotherapeutic disciplines in business. Some of the skills are the same it is true and some of the techniques and methodologies can be applied but the workplace is not the place for these activities.
- coaching is not training that is delivered on a One-on-One basis.
- coaching is not Neurolinguistic Programming or Transactional Analysis or Transformational Technology or The Inner Game.
- Coaching is not a philosophy.
- Coaching is not 'Life Coaching'
While coaching may borrow from and be informed by some of the above it is a skill set in its own right that is focussed on performance and learning.

The Use of Executive Coaching within an Organisation

The definition of coaching provided above is fairly generic and could be applied in many situations and environments. It is relevant for teachers, sports coaches, managers and Executive Coaches. Below I outline a variety situations in which Executive Coaching is commonly used

- One-on-One Performance Coaching
This is perhaps the most common form of coaching. An individual agrees with a coach a number of performance goals and they then work together to achieve the goals. The length of the coaching programme is dictated by the time-frame in which the goals are to be achieved. The goals are often drawn from business objectives, projects and other tasks and can include things like improving working relationships and personal effectiveness.

An example

A Director of an international pharmaceutical company charged with re-organising the European distribution network. His goals included

- delivering the project within time and within budget
 - maintaining the performance of the existing system during the change-over
 - building a team with representatives from each country involved
 - becoming more effective so that he had a better balance between home and work
 - learning to work with the various stakeholders so that they became allies not detractors
- One-on-One Development Coaching

This is very similar to the above. Engagements of this nature are concerned with the development of more personal skills and behaviours and may involve gaining a deeper understanding of the individual's beliefs, attitudes and motivation. Many of the practitioners in this field will have a psychological background and will use a variety of assessment methodologies and instruments. Programmes are typically longer than for a performance coaching programme, although I believe this is because in many cases the coaches are stuck in a more clinical or therapeutic model and, in fact, the programme need not be so long.

An example

A partner in a consulting firm who, while being intellectually exceptional found that other consultants tried to avoid being on his projects. Goals included

- Developing a leadership style that was less aggressive
- Becoming more adept at helping/facilitating/coaching
- Becoming less obsessive about the need for solutions that were 100% correct

▪ **Team Coaching**

Team coaching involves working with a group of people that share a common purpose, task project or set of goals. An initial part of such an engagement will typically involve building the team itself and then focussing on the performance goals.

An example

A small team of seven charged by their organisation to create a telephone and internet bank from scratch. Goals included:

- building a robust team in which individuals could be open and creative, take risks and be supported
- generating a vision for the new bank
- creating a strategy for the delivery of the vision

▪ **The Strategic use of Coaching**

Organisations are increasingly using Executive Coaching to support senior individuals during major change programmes, particularly programmes that involve behavioural change around issues such as leadership, management style etc. This can be a very effective use of coaching as a kind of critical mass can be built up, with a number of people developing in the same direction at the same time.

An example

A not-for-profit organisation where a new chief executive launched a change initiative to have the staff be more outward looking and client focussed and to adopt a more facilitative management style. The eight seniormost executives engaged in a coaching programme where each individual developed personal goals congruent with the purpose and objectives of the change programme.