

Questions to ask a Prospective Coach

With the continuing emergence of Executive Coaching as an option available to enhance the performance and development of, in particular, senior executives the average buyer of such services is faced with many difficult decisions. Not least amongst these is the selection of the coach. In a market that has no regulation and no barriers to entry anyone can establish themselves as a coach. The following questions are designed to help a buyer make an assessment of the capability of the coach.

- **How do you propose to measure the success of the coaching?**
Answering this question convincingly is one mark of a competent professional coach. It is true that it can be difficult to measure the success because some of the results are so personal. However, it is possible and having a set of performance goals and associated success measures is one option. These are generated between the coach and the person being coached and would ideally include input from a representative of the employer organisation (HR manager or line-manager). Such goals can be reviewed at the end of the programme. The term 'performance goals' is very specific; any coaching that does not produce a different order of result for the organisation should not be done on the organisations time or paid for with the organisations money. Another option is to collect feedback from colleagues before and after the coaching programme. Additionally, many organisations have performance management systems that can also be used to measure changes in performance and behaviour.
- **Which party is the client, the person being coached or the employer organisation?**
Many coaches with a background in say psychotherapy will tend to view the person being coached as the client. The implication of this is that what occurs between the coach and the coachee is completely confidential to those parties. I believe this is not right at least in those situations where the employer organisation is paying the fees and the coaching is designed to help the individual achieve business goals. In such cases the organisation is the client. And has certain 'rights'. A representative of the organisation will want to know what the intended results of the coaching programme are and may want to make some suggestions. On way of ensuring that the best interests of both parties are served is, as suggested earlier, to generate a set of programme goals with the person being coached. Some of these goals are private and are kept between the individual and the coach while others are public and are passed to the individual's manager and an HR representative for input and feedback. The goals are revisited at the end of the programme. Other than this the content of all conversations between coach and coachee are confidential.
- **What would you do if your coachee elected to do something that was not in the best interests of the organisation?**
- **Do you have supervision and if so in what form?**
The notion of supervision is borrowed from the various 'helping' professions from psychology through to counselling and refers to a relationship between the professional and another, usually more experienced, colleague. The purpose of supervision in coaching is to ensure that the best interests of the individual being coached and the client organisation are protected and that the coach is supported and continues learning. Supervision helps a coach maintain perspective during a coaching programme and not get lost in, for instance, their own judgements, the organisational politics or the coachee's 'reality'. Very few coaches have any supervision but it is a vital ingredient in effective coaching .
- **What training have you had?**
The quality and depth of the training (if any) will give a strong indication of competence. There have emerged in the last few years a number of organisations that provide training for coaches. These vary significantly in quality. Effective training programmes will have a significant practical element and be of some length. Another common – and effective –

training approach is a kind of apprenticeship model that the few reputable firms offer their staff. Psychotherapists who turn to coaching without taking the time to discover the differences may be doing psychotherapy in the workplace which will have a different result from coaching. Retired managers intent on 'sharing their experience' may stifle the coachee and create dependence.

- **What models underpin your coaching?**

People come to be coaches through many routes. They come from the psychological and the psychotherapeutic disciplines. They come from pop psychology and philosophy. They come from the world of sport and the world of business. All of these can help but they are not coaching and if your prospective coach is predominantly dependant on any such model or background they may not be coaching. Coaching is something in its' own right – a set of skill deployed with the intent to help another perform and learn. There is a growing acknowledgement that the most effective coaching is predominantly 'non-directive'. In this approach the role of the coach is to help the coachee explore a topic or issue, to gain a better understanding, to become more aware and from that state to make a better decision than they would have done anyway.

- **Why do you coach?**

Perhaps I am too cynical but if the answer to this question is a version of 'being of service to others' then beware. Sure that is almost certainly part of the answer but it is very seldom all of it. I am not going to suggest that there is only one legitimate reason to coach or that there not people out there with a real desire to serve others but most coaches that I have met are in some sense in it for themselves; they are fulfilling some kind of need. If they are not aware of their own motivation then they are incapable of rising above it and it will inevitable infect the coaching (for instance building dependency). Equally if they are unaware of their own make up they are unlikely to be capable of fully understanding the person they are coaching.

- **Do you have a coach?**

It is surprising how many coaches do not have a coach. I am not suggesting that this needs to be a permanent feature in coach's professional life, but I would be interested to know why someone who extols the value of coaching was not receiving occasionally coaching. However. not having a supervisor is a different, more serious, matter