

Training for Development Coaches

"If you take lessons before you are well and truly co-coordinated, you are merely learning another way of using yourself badly". Aldous Huxley

Introduction

I have not yet met a child who has declared, "When I grow up I want to be an executive coach". Shocking. (Or just great wisdom!) Most people entering the discipline of executive coaching are commencing on a second or third career and will either have had exposure to one of the allied disciplines (psychology etc.) mentioned later or will be from the business world itself, intent on sharing their wisdom and experience. That it is a second or third career for most people is perhaps the single greatest shaping force on the current state of the provision of training and development activities. Most of these people have gone through extensive training in the past and do not, rightly or wrongly, feel the need for more. Hence the current reality is that there is not very much available for people to help them become coaches that is formal and organised.

The training and development of coaches is something that I have been involved in for almost fifteen years, initially in a small consulting firm and latterly with The School of Coaching. I say this first for two reasons. One, in effect, to present my credentials and two, more importantly, to declare my interests and prejudices; the School has a particular approach to the training and development of coaches and a particular understanding of coaching that may not be – is not – commonly held.

That out of the way let me briefly say what I intend covering in this chapter. We start with an overview of what is currently available to people wishing to be trained as Executive Coaches. This is important as it gives some insight into how the training of coaches might develop. Then we move to what I believe is central to training and developing coaches. This is broken into two parts: the content (what people need to learn) and the process (how they might best learn that). This obviously borrows heavily from my experiences with the School. The final part of this chapter draws some conclusions and looks to the future of developing coaches

In writing this I have tried to include more than the obvious and I imagine that some of the notions I have included here will provoke questions. I hope so because conversation and discussion is essential. And what follows is just one person's contribution to the debate.

What's currently available

As you might imagine in an emerging profession, if that is what executive coaching is, there is not that much available to the individual wishing to become a coach. You will find very little that is formal and organised. A brief overview reveals three loose categories of training and development activities; apprenticeship in a firm that provides coaching services, training in an allied discipline and finally engagement with one of the few organisations offering training in coaching.

Apprenticeship in a firm providing coaching services

There are a growing number of organisations that offer executive coaching. Those that have been involved for the longest have induction and training programmes designed to support the novice through the development phases to the point where they are contributing members of staff. These programmes are typically developed within the organisation, without much reference to what might be happening in other parts of the sector, and are concerned with passing on best practice from one generation to the next. Given that most of the organisations offering executive coaching are still relatively small and the pressure to have to generate income so great, it is almost always the case that the novice does not get all the attention that might be desirable and often gets pushed before the client prematurely. Nevertheless I think it is fair to say that, to date, this has been the most effective route to becoming a professional coach.

Training in an allied discipline

Many of those now operating as coaches have taken a sideways step from an allied discipline such as psychology or psychotherapy. In this category I also include other disciplines and approaches that are less recognised such as Neurolinguistic Programming, Transformational Technology and The Inner Game to name but a few. All of these disciplines have much to offer to the Executive Coach. But a word of warning; none of these disciplines *is* coaching in and of itself. I say this because many appear to believe that their discipline is coaching while the original models and approaches were developed with a different intent to coaching. . You only have to look at the length – a year in some cases – of the executive coaching engagements recommended by many of the psychologically based approaches to see that.

That said a strong background in the disciplines mentioned above and others should provide a very strong foundation for developing as a coach as many of the skills acquired can transfer easily. More than that, the original discipline will offer additional opportunities; a psychologist or psychotherapist will recognize much more quickly when an individual has ‘deeper’ needs that cannot be met by coaching.

Formal programmes

Formal programmes are very few. This is not surprising as the market is still so small. These are programmes offered by organisations that are aimed at developing coaches or coaching skill on a commercial basis. In a few cases the organisations have developed relationships with Universities and other organisational establishments who provide various forms of accreditation. What is on offer is very broad in terms of quality and in terms of programme duration; which can be anything from two days to a year. In almost all of these cases the shape of the programme is dictated much more by what the providers believe the market will buy and much less by what is required to develop a competent coach.

Within each of these categories you will find varying degrees of professionalism, understanding of the topic and associated issues and comprehensiveness in the training. Inevitably. However, as the profession emerges there will be increasing need for consistency and quality in the training process. The next two parts of this describes what I believe to be the key elements of an effective process for developing competent coaches

Development Programmes: The Process

My instinct is to describe what might be learned before I describe how it might be learned. But because coaching is, to quote Tim Gallwey, author of ‘The Inner Game of Work’, “an art that must be learned mostly from experience”, I will describe the process first. And as I think more about it there is an inherent integrity in this in that a programme in which the process has precedence – comes first – is much more likely to meet the real needs of the participants and more accurately reflects the nature of non-directive coaching.

The most effective training programmes, I believe, should have three phases; Training, Apprenticeship and Supervision. Before describing these phases I would like to flag up the notion of pre-qualification; that it might be worth putting candidates through an assessment process prior to the development programme itself. This should ensure that there is a real understanding of the candidate’s needs and the likelihood of their success in the programme.

Training phase

Despite my preference towards a non-directive style in the early part of the development programme there is a place for something a little more directive. Experience does suggest that there are some models and practices that are useful and that can be quickly assimilated. However, the sooner return to following the interest of the participant the better. In this phase might think of themselves as a guide, more than anything else. This suggests that the guide has been through the territory before and therefore has some useful information and experience, but that the exact path is of the participants choosing.

The purpose of the training phase is to give the participant the core models, for instance the GROW model which is familiar to many, and to develop the core skills, such as listening and asking questions, so that they can begin to coach others. A typical approach at the School is to describe a model or skill and then demonstrate it. The participants then practice the model or skill with each other and receive feedback from the programme leader and their colleagues. I refer back to the Gallwey quote above; people learn coaching by doing it and 80% of any programme should be focused on practice.

At the School we advocate starting with 'practice clients'; these are people who have a real need and desire to be coached but who understand that the coach is in training – the nearest thing to a 'safe environment' in the real world. This is marvelous technique for accelerating learning and meeting the issues that the 'real world' throws up before actually being exposed to paying clients.

Apprenticeship

There may not be a very significant distinction between this phase and supervision in terms of practice. In both cases the coach is delivering coaching, possibly with paying clients, but in the Apprenticeship phase it is clearly acknowledged that the coach is still learning, typically in the care of a more experienced coach and mentor. This is a more active and structured relationship than supervision with a lot of attention focused on thinking through meetings etc in advance. (Supervision tends to be more concerned with learning from events that have occurred). In this phase the trainee coach also learns the consulting skills involved in delivering value to the client and account/client management skills.

Supervision

In a way this is beyond the confines of my particular chapter in this book, which is about the development of coaches. Supervision is an on-going process beginning in the Apprenticeship phase and continuing throughout the professional life of the coach. The purpose of supervision, which I have defined elsewhere, is "to ensure that the best interests of the Coachee and the Client are protected and to provide educative and restorative support to the Coach". Supervision is focused on three parties and the relationships between them; the person being coached, the client and the coach.

Development Programmes: The Content

The core areas of content for exploration are by no means unique to coaching; it is only when they are pulled together in the service of another person's performance, learning and enjoyment that they equate to coaching.

I have grouped these areas as specific Skill Sets (Diagram 14.1) and shown in first column. In the third column I have listed the specific skills in each set. The middle column is entitled 'intent' and by this I mean the purpose or aim of the coach when deploying one or more of the skills. As a coach understanding one's own 'intent' in any moment of coaching is a key component in becoming more effective. There is not the space in this chapter to go into all the distinctions in the chart but there are some that I would like to draw out

Generating understanding/raising awareness

Intent: to help the coachee understand themselves/their situation more fully so that they can make better decisions. The primary function of the coach is to understand. Not to solve, fix, heal, make better or be wise. To understand. The magic is that it is in that moment of understanding that the coachee themselves understand for themselves, become more aware and are then in a position to make better decisions and choices than they would have done anyway. This is how coaching is profoundly simple and simply profound. But most of us struggle to get above our own agenda and want to be seen to be making a difference.

Adding

Intent: To make available to the coachee the coach's wisdom, insight, intelligence, observations, intuition and experience. There are occasions in coaching – and always fewer than you think –

where the coach has something of value to add. This set of skills is concerned with making that available to the coachee in such a way that they can choose whether or not to include the 'value added' in their understanding, leaving them free again to make their own choice.

Managing self

This comes in two parts;

One. Intent: To minimise the impact of the coaches needs, preconceptions, judgements etc on the coachee. I believe that it is impossible – and perhaps not entirely desirable – for a coach to be completely non-directive. So one part on managing oneself as a coach is to be able to identify one's own 'stuff' and to deal with it appropriately. 'Stuff' may take the form of notions and judgements that are not relevant to the coachee. And then there will be 'stuff' that is relevant. Distinguishing one from the other is clearly critical. I have also included in the section the 'boundary awareness', perhaps clumsily. There are a number of boundaries that are important to be aware of in coaching; personal/professional, coaching/counselling/therapy, in your depth/out of your depth. This last one is important, particularly when a topic of discussion has an emotional overtone and the question, for the coach, that goes with it is whether the coach can maintain their equilibrium, judgement and distance or not. If you are in your depth you can continue coaching, if not you need to stop and find appropriate support for the coachee (and probably yourself).

Two. Intent: To maximise one's own performance as a coach. There is a mental state that can be achieved in which one performs with excellence, where all one's faculties are available and one's sensitivity heightened. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Professor of psychology and education at the University of Chicago called this state "flow" in his book 'Flow; the psychology of happiness. I quote "in the flow state action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor". Tim Gallwey, mentioned earlier, in his first and seminal book The Inner Game of Tennis called this "Self Two". There is a skill in getting into this place. It is where the very best coaching happens. It is not a skill that I have found a way of 'mastering', but I am getting better at it.

Hence the quote at the top of the chapter:

"If you take lessons before you are well and truly co-ordinated you are merely learning another way of using yourself badly".

Building Relationship

Intent: To create an environment in which the coachee feels safe and unjudged. Without a relationship there is no coaching. In fact the only real mistake that a coach can make in a coaching session is to damage the relationship. Everything else is recoverable. The relationship need not be particularly strong the coach does not even have to like the coachee (probably has to love them though). It needs to be a working relationship, fit for purpose. Generating a clear contract with the coachee is one critical element. This might include things like programme objectives, ground rules (confidentiality), meeting schedule etc.

Understanding organisational context

Intent: To ensure that the coaching engagement meets the clients needs. I get into a lot of trouble over this one, particularly with people who come from a psychological background. The important distinction is between the coachee and the client. The client is really the organisation itself and typically there will be someone representing the organisation; the person who pays the bill. In, say, a psychotherapeutic relationship they are usually the same person. For coaching to be successful the organisations needs must be met as well as the individuals, the coachee's. A competent coach needs to have the consulting skills to be able to understand the organisational context within which their coaching engagement is taking place.

Future Developments

I thought that this final section would be the easiest to write but it has not proven to be the case. Part of this is that the future of the training and development process is so dependant on the

future of the profession of Executive coaching and I have more questions about that with each passing moment. So here are some of the questions

Can coaching find its' own unique identity? To take its place as a profession I believe that coaching must find it's own identity and in so doing distance itself from the psychological disciplines and from the ex-executive as coach; this being the provenance of the significant majority of executive coaches.

To what degree will demand continue to increase? As managers begin to 'get it' that their job is at least in part to coach will that decrease or increase the need for executive coaching?

If a coaching profession emerges will there be a demand for an Association? Would such an association become a monolith, stifling debate and creativity or would it provide a framework in which coaching could prosper? Whose interests would it serve? The profession, a small elite who got there first, the market/clients?

Will firms compete aggressively or co-operate where there are areas of obvious mutual interest

If there is increased demand how will the profession develop structurally? Will the better firms end up functioning much as management consultancies do now? Will they be bought out by larger consultancies themselves? Or will the self-employed coach, flexible and less expensive be the favoured model?

I could go on. Would that a balance be struck between the interconnectedness of the players in the field and the benefits that that could bring (standards, educating the market) and the flexibility and creativity of the independent coach or small firm. All the great coaches that I have come to know have been in some way subversives, big organisations, processes and procedures will not contain them.

As for the training and development of coaches all that can be said is that in this time of some chaos those who invest in themselves and in their staff will be the one's to profit. And, with all humility, the model that I have outlined here is the best that I know of.