

Coaching – the low cost, high impact development solution

The applications for coaching are almost endless: whether you are focusing on developing your leaders and top talent, looking for a more effective way to transfer learning from training events back into the workplace or aiming to drive down costs and increase productivity – coaching holds the answer!

It is a pretty impressive claim but one which we at Mentor can substantiate through the successes we have experienced with our clients. This paper is written by Susan Grandfield, who is a personal effectiveness coach working with Mentor Group. She has written this discussion paper in order to help organisations see coaching as a viable development solution when resources are limited and budgets are tight. Keep reading to find out why “**coaching is the low cost, high impact development solution**”.

Coaching is not a new concept; in fact the CIPD have found that around 80% of organisations are using coaching as part of their approach to developing their workforce. However, there still seems to be a degree of uncertainty surrounding the true impact of coaching on an organisations bottom line and a reluctance to invest in coaching in times of financial pressure.

True, it can be difficult to identify a direct link between the intangible conversation between a coach and their coachee and the financial results of the organisation, and therefore difficult to justify the expense. However, this discussion paper aims to highlight the value and benefits of coaching to an organisation, some of which relate to financial performance, but many of which relate to other key performance indicators which are equally important to long-term success. As a result of reading this paper you will be in a better position to justify investing in coaching, and have a greater awareness of how to maximise the return on that investment.

The first argument to deal with is the belief that coaching costs too much money. On the face of it, spending upwards of £500 for a 1:1 coaching session (duration 1-2 hours) may seem like a lot of money to spend on one individual, when you can train 12 people for around £1500 a day (£125 per person), however, the long term impact of that 1:1 coaching session will far outweigh the impact of a one day training programme on those 12 people.

Coaching, by its very nature, is bespoke to the individual. A coaching session provides that individual with time and space to reflect and to reach a higher level of self-awareness than they are able to do alone, or in a group. A skilled coach is able to tap into their coachee's inner resources and through questioning, listening and reflecting back, enable them to move on from where they are now to where they need to be.

One example of the benefit of 1:1 coaching over group training comes from a client who was lacking in self-confidence when communicating with more senior people in their organisation. Through a series of 1:1 coaching sessions that client was able to draw on the confidence he had in other areas of his work and personal life and apply the same thought process to meetings and presentations with his senior managers. This gave him the confidence to actively seek out opportunities to communicate with senior management more often and as a result he raised his profile within the organisation and subsequently secured a promotion. This client did not need to be told how to be more confident or how to present to senior management, he just needed to draw on the resources he already had in order to work out his own strategy for increasing his confidence.

A second argument to deal with is the belief that coaching is intangible and difficult to measure. Well it can be, but only if the goal or outcomes for the coaching are not clear from the start. When an individual or organisation engages with a coach, the first question that needs to be answered is "what do you want to be different by the end of the process?" The answer could be financial improvement, behaviour change, increase in output/productivity, improved relationships, career development and so on. Whatever it is, it needs to be measurable. A skilled coach will work with the coachee and the client (or sponsor) to identify the individual's goals and the organisational goals. Once those are agreed, the coach will keep bringing the coachee back to the goal in each session to monitor their progress towards it.

An example of this comes from another client who was in a position where she needed to improve the effectiveness of her team. The team was not performing as effectively as it should and the manager (the coachee) had tried many different approaches and could not find a way forward. The goal for the manager (as agreed by her manager) was to improve the productivity of the team month on month to reach an overall improvement of 5% over a 6 month period and to increase the employee engagement score on the organisation's employee opinion survey by a minimum of 2 points. As a result of six 1:1 coaching sessions, the manager achieved her goal and 6 months on is continuing to improve the productivity and engagement scores for her team. The coaching breakthrough that she had was to recognise that her management style was having a negative impact on her team. Something which she had failed to recognise previously despite 360° feedback and attending management training courses.

Both of the examples given above demonstrate the impact that coaching has the potential to have, not only on the individual, but also on the organisation and its performance.

Referring back to the title of this discussion paper "Coaching - the low cost, high impact development solution", we have explored the high impact piece but you are perhaps still questioning the low cost part. This is where it is important to explore the opportunities to develop coaching in-house and thereby avoid the need to spend money on external coaches.

Many organisations are recognising the benefits of developing in-house coaches e.g. the BBC has its own Coaching Academy, Tesco has been developing internal coaches throughout the business for a number of years and the NHS is investing in developing the coaching skills of its managers. The benefits of developing internal coaches are:

- Cost saving - compared to paying for external coaches
- Greater understanding of the business and the challenges coachees face
- Easier to arrange coaching sessions as coaches may be on-site
- Relationship may already be established between coach and coachee
- Skills development of individuals within the organisation

There are clearly potential difficulties with using internal coaches (e.g. confidentiality, conflict of interests, more difficult to be non-judgemental and so on), however, in times of reduced funds for developing the workforce, this can be a very cost effective way of developing both coaches and coachees.

Coaching is fundamentally about raising self-awareness and generating responsibility in the coachee (ref. Sir John Whitmore). The impact of having individuals within your organisation who are more aware of their strengths, development needs, the impact they have on others, their goals and aspirations, their values and beliefs is clearly invaluable to an organisation. Traditional approaches to developing self-awareness and improving performance, such as attending training courses, completing psychometrics or personality profiles, 360° feedback, all have significant benefits; however, they alone will not enable an individual to achieve the level of self-awareness that the time and space with a skilled coach will.

Once you introduce coaching into your organisation, you will see the impact in the performance of individuals and teams, the quality of relationships and communication, the ability to generate new ideas and approaches, the motivation and drive of individuals and so on. You will have no difficulty justifying the initial investment in introducing coaching into your organisation and in developing the coaching skills of your managers.

Mentor Group has a number of qualified coaches who work with many of our clients on 1:1 executive coaching, operational coaching and on the development of coaching skills for internal coaches. We would love the opportunity to help you identify how best to introduce or develop coaching in your organisations.

Please contact us through our website – www.mentorgroup.co.uk or email solutions@mentorgroup.co.uk

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