

Introduction

Coaching may have moved into the mainstream of management development practice, but watch out, choose your coach carefully.

“The boom in coaching has peppered the market with its share of bluffers. Over time, many will be weeded out and this may take care of the problem but for now organisations should check out potential coaches very carefully”, says Richard O’Rawe.

Coaching is no longer a fad

Coaching is no longer just a fad. It is well established and we can expect to see a whole lot more of it. Most training organisations have played down coaching or rather, ignored the methodology of people working with other people to improve performance. Maybe it is seen as too clinical, or too personal, or it was not within their competence. It may be that it is just too costly for clients. Packing 20-30 people into one room for talk and chalk is certainly an efficient way to teach, but it is not the most effective way to learn.

An Effective Way to Learn

Packing 20-30 people into one room for talk and chalk is certainly an efficient way to teach, but it is not the most effective way to learn.

Two types of coaching

There are two distinct types of coaching. One is, "the external executive type coach who has expertise in enhancing other people's development and performance ... usually directed at mid to senior level managers in the organisation. These coaches come in and work with a group of people and help fine-tune them to move forward. Sometimes with spectacular results," says Anthony Grant, founder and director of the world's first university-based coaching psychology unit at the University of Sydney's School of Psychology.

The other type is the manager as coach. A manager in the workplace who is being systematically trained in what is call “coaching skills”. Unfortunately, the number-one management shortcoming seems to be good communication and feedback-giving skills. These are crucial skills for good coaching.

Coaching Pays...We just need to prove it

Many of the coaching skills needed by a manager are little more than good management practice. Transferring coaching skills is therefore in itself a good way to improve management because it develops essential skills in managers.

Business is always looking for better ways to do business. And business is beginning to accept that

Skills for Good Coaching

Unfortunately, the number-one management shortcoming seems to be good communication and feedback-giving skills. These are crucial skills for good coaching.

coaching pays. The jury is still out in terms of hard empirical evidence on the level of return on the investment but businesses already know that good coaching, done well, pays off.

Managers with coaching skills relate better to people and help them to work smarter rather than harder. This also helps ease workload problems. Organisations are looking for better ways to tap into the knowledge of workers and coaching is ideal for tapping into people's personal knowledge and skills base. It adds value by getting the most from what is already there and providing the support needed for further personal and work-related development.

Coaching is underpinned by the idea that people want to be the best they can be. People want to have a good time at work, be better at what they do, enjoy what they do and have some sort of development through learning.

According to Grant, a good coach needs to have three things.

“They must have a really good. Why? Because when you coach you work with very smart people and you need to be able to reason from first principles. You must be able to see and understand details and get back to the broader picture even when you don't know a lot about the issues involved.

“Then you need a high level of emotional intelligence, or EQ. You need to be astute about understanding yourself, how your own emotions get generated, how those aid and assist you and other people to reach their goals. You must understand the nature of your relationship with other people.

“And coaches need good systems intelligence. “You have to understand how human systems function and operate, how they change and how you work within those systems to create and maintain change. You can learn about systems, you can to some extent enhance your EQ. Your IQ is pretty much fixed. When you put those qualities together you are looking at a pretty small percentage of the population that really make it in the professional coaching business”.

If a coach is not good they can make the situation worse for a manager who is under a lot of pressure in his or her job. Whether that will cause serious damage we don't yet know. The rule of thumb is that if there is the potential to do good there is always the potential to do harm and so when people are employing coaches they should screen them very carefully. Our advice is to check them out thoroughly. You have been warned.