COACHING
AN INTRODUCTION FOR IOP MEMBERS
What is coaching?

Most of us are familiar with the term “coaching” in a sporting context. It describes a focused, goal-oriented activity where the coach’s objective is to maximize the athlete’s potential. Key to this concept is the notion of the coach as facilitator and motivator, rather than teacher: someone who enables their charge to achieve a level of performance that they would not have reached through their own endeavours alone.

Coaching in the workplace is a relatively recent, and increasingly widespread, phenomenon. While there is no industry standard definition, the Chartered Institute for Personnel & Development describes coaching in broad but accessible terms as:

“Developing a person’s skills and knowledge so that their job performance improves, hopefully leading to the achievement of organizational objectives. It targets high performance and improvement at work, although it may also have an impact on an individual’s private life. It usually lasts for a short period and focuses on specific skills and goals.”

The rise of coaching in the workplace has been ascribed to new, flatter organizational structures that require employees to make significant leaps in performance to learn new skills quickly when they move into new roles. Rapid changes in technology and processes may also make similar demands on employees’ skill sets. Employees – particularly managers and specialists – increasingly need individually tailored, “just in time” development. Betsy Morris, writing for Fortune magazine at the turn of the century, summed up coaching as the learning activity best able to “bridge the growing chasm between what managers are being asked to do and what they have been trained to do”.

Traditional training and development programmes may not be as effective in this process as coaching. Key to the success of coaching is the concept of one-to-one consultation, which allows the individual to receive support tailored to their needs. Coaching can incorporate specific work/life needs, address skill development and deal with other issues, such as developing leadership or motivational skills.

The coach could be internal, such as a manager, or an external professional coach. A coach partners the individual to improve self-awareness, identify aspirations, plan goals, set targets, and devise and implement effective strategies to reach them. They work with the individual to resolve problems and overcome barriers, and thereby stay focused and on track.

Typically, coaching sessions:

1. are one-to-one discussions;
2. fall within a set timeframe;
3. are aimed at specific issues but ultimately to improve work performance;
4. focus on strengths, weaknesses, improving performance and developing skills;
5. can include organizational and individual goals;
6. place emphasis on performance at work although this can be affected by personal issues;
7. have an agenda that is typically set by the individual, but in agreement or consultation with the organization.

What coaching isn’t

There is some confusion about what exactly coaching is and how it differs from other “helping behaviours”, such as counselling and mentoring. It is important to differentiate between each individual’s needs and to access relative support where needed. Counselling, training and mentoring are usually delivered by other professionals with a different
relationship to the client.

Coaching does not extend to personal, behavioral or psychological issues. If any of these needs are identified, particularly if they are having an impact on the individual’s ability to work effectively, they should be referred for professional counselling. Counselling is a highly skilled intervention focused on helping individuals to address underlying psychological problems.

Training needs might be identified through coaching sessions and can be included in the individual’s goal plan. Mentoring is a longer-term commitment from an experienced person who is passing on their knowledge, experience and advice. Meetings are usually less formal and are based more on the requirements of the mentee.

**What is involved in a typical coaching programme?**

Coaching presupposes that the client is not “broken” – they work perfectly, and it is not the coach’s responsibility to “fix” them. The client is an expert on themselves, while the skill of the coach, and their role, is in allowing the person to come up with their own solutions. This doesn’t mean that the coach brings nothing to the relationship – they have knowledge based theory, methods, exercises and questions that help the person to move forwards. Nevertheless, the coach’s skills are based on processes, not solutions.

In essence, coaching has two main facets. First it is performance focused, which means that it is concerned with helping individuals to perform tasks to the best of their ability. Second, it is person-centred, which means that the individuals being coached are seen to have the important insights.

Fundamentally then, coaching is about drawing out, not putting in. Or, put another way: “The brain with the problem is the one with the solution.” Coaches work in the certain belief that people have vast reserves of potential that are rarely used, and that it is their job to draw it out.

**How can coaching help you?**

It seems these days that a large number of people, most of whom are formerly stressed-out executives and middle-managers, are prepared to describe in detail how coaching has transformed their working lives. It has improved not only their job performance but also the enjoyment and satisfaction that they derive from their work.

To the skeptical, such testimonies sound closer to therapy than professional development. But work takes up a major part of your life. It should provide an opportunity to fulfill your personal needs and aspirations, not a stressful time endured to make ends meet. Far from being something that simply helps you to get through the day, coaching should enable you to reclaim control of your time, re-examine your goals and values, and reprioritise accordingly.

**Coaching should aim to:**

1. concentrate on where you are now and what you are willing and able to do to get where you want to be in the future;
2. accelerate your progress by providing greater focus and awareness of possibilities leading to more effective choices.

**By engaging in a coaching relationship, you can expect to experience:**

1. fresh perspectives on personal challenges and opportunities;
2. enhanced thinking and decision-making skills;
3. improved interpersonal effectiveness;
4. increased confidence in carrying out your roles.

Provided that you take responsibility for taking action and making your own decisions, and you don’t rely on the coach to provide solutions, you should also expect to see appreciable results in the areas of productivity, personal satisfaction with life and work, and the achievement of personally relevant goals.
Do you need a coach?

Coaching is particularly relevant when you are faced with change: increased responsibility or promotion, change of boss or colleagues, change of role or organization, redundancy – or even retirement. Or you might just want to review where you are now. Some questions to ask yourself:

- Are you successful in your professional life but want to feel more fulfilled?
- Would you like to unleash your potential and that of your team(s)?
- Are you missing out on opportunities that you would like?
- Is your business/area of responsibility growing as fast as you want?
- Do you feel stuck in a rut with respect to your career?
- Have you lost your enthusiasm?
- Do you have difficulty relating to your colleagues?
- Does your team/company have a high turnover of staff?

Benefits that can be expected from coaching:

- A clear and realistic view of what you want to achieve with your career and how you expect to achieve it;
- Improved business and interpersonal relationships, and personal effectiveness;
- Reduced stress and firm control of your workload;
- Help in building the motivation to succeed;
- A clearer view of barriers that you face and guidance to overcome them;
- A sound appreciation of your own strengths and weaknesses, and help in using your time and resources to your greatest advantage;
- A mature understanding of priorities that helps you to manage your workload, deal with career-progression issues, and achieve;
- Strategies to achieve the work/life balance that you desire;
- Improved skills in decision making and problem solving.

With a plan and someone to support you along the way, you will be well on the way to success.

Can you be a coach to your staff?

Coaching can be delivered by externally contracted coaches, specialist internal coaches, HR experts, line managers or supervisors. The amount of coaching carried out by line managers looks set to rise significantly during the next few years.

The majority of coaching carried out in organizations is provided for middle and junior managers and is delivered by internal resources, principally by line managers. The use of external coaches tends to be reserved for coaching senior-level or high-potential employees, or to help an organization to develop its coaching capabilities by designing and delivering internal coaching skills programmes.

It is essential that any coach possesses the key skills of listening, reflecting, summarizing, challenging and mediating, all based on a trusting relationship. Most organizations access training for line managers to equip them with the skills to be an effective coach.
Strategies that an organization can implement to encourage a coaching culture

1. Provide an advanced coaching skills programme for senior managers.
2. Provide opportunities to review good coaching practice.
3. Recognize and reward managers who demonstrate good coaching.
4. Measure and provide feedback on the quality, relevance and accessibility of coaching.
5. Ensure that top management provides strong, positive role models.
6. Identify cultural and systems barriers to developmental behaviours.
7. Track how much the organization is perceived to support development and coaching activity in a variety of ways, including through employee attitude surveys.

External coaches will always be an important resource for organizations because few managers have the expertise and breadth of experience of external coaches – or their perceived greater neutrality and confidentiality. But it seems that the major focus for the next few years is building internal coaching expertise by developing the skills of managers and internal coaches.

Internal coaching

Internal coaches are preferable when:

1. knowing the company culture, history and politics is critical;
2. easy availability and accessibility is desired;
3. being able to build up a high level of personal trust over a period of time is important;
4. there is a need to keeping costs under control.

You will know that you have a coaching climate when:

1. there is good understanding at all levels about what effective developers and developees do;
2. coaching is seen primarily as an opportunity rather than a remedial intervention;
3. people are recognized and rewarded for their activity in sharing knowledge;
4. time for reflection is valued;
5. there are effective mechanisms for identifying and addressing barriers to learning;
6. people look first inside the organization for their next job;
7. there are strong role models for good coaching practice;
8. personal growth, team development and organizational learning are integrated and the links clearly understood;
9. people are able to engage in constructive and positive challenging;
10. people welcome feedback (even at the top) and actively seek it;
11. coaching is seen as a responsibility of managers and their direct reports.
Selecting an external coach

External coaches are preferable when:

1. sensitive feedback is needed for senior managers;
2. specialized expertise from a variety of organizational and industry situations suits the needs of the coachee/s;
3. individuals are concerned about conflicts of interest and whether confidentiality will be observed;
4. a range of ideas and experience is needed;
5. it is important that the coach is perceived as objective;
6. neutrality and objectivity are required.

The single most important factor for successful outcomes in one-to-one relationships such as coaching is the quality of the relationship between coach and client. Different individuals will prefer different styles of coaching relationship based on a supportive approach, whereas a few benefit from a rather more confrontational dialogue.

Considering an individual’s personality and preferred learning style may give an indication of which of these styles will work best.

Questions to ask about a prospective coach:

1. What qualifications do they have?
2. Do they have relevant and substantial industry experience?
3. Do they have a track record of success and references?
4. Do they use proven coaching models and approaches?
5. Will they fit in with your organization?
6. How do they monitor progress and quality?
7. Can they demonstrate an understanding of boundaries?
8. Are they a member of a professional body?
9. Do their personal characteristics suit your organization and the individual to be coached defensiveness or unresolved feelings of guilt?

How do you find a coach?

Coaching services are currently offered by a range of individuals and organisations. Some coaches are self-employed or operate in small firms. There are also coaching consulting firms for which coaching is a major part of their practice, while large HR, management, outplacement and recruitment consultancies are adding coaching services to their portfolios. Many of these recruit people with track records in business as senior managers then train them as coaches.

Other firms deliver coaching within a business psychology model where their coaches are qualified occupational, counselling or clinical psychologists. Other backgrounds include performance coaches from the sporting world and practitioners from a range of other therapeutic backgrounds (counselling, psychology, psychotherapy).

Naturally, these different types of coach all bring with them very different skills, and this is where opinion begins to diverge on which skills, qualities and experience coaches should have.

Consult with the learning and development or human resources team in your organization to determine the level of support currently available. It will be able to advise you on resource issues and might already have coaches registered with it.

In an evolving industry, word of mouth is a valid approach. You may have attended a professional seminar or conference and heard a professional coach speak. If this person was speaking at an industry function then you will know that they already have some knowledge of your industry sector. Additionally, you might have had the opportunity to speak to the coach before going down the path of negotiating their services.
Using an online internet search or yellow pages telephone directory will give you a multitude of coaches. Unfortunately the profession is not thoroughly regulated yet and virtually anyone can set themselves up in practice. Quality can be hugely variable and this is where the buyers of coaching services can face difficulties. There are a growing number of business advisers and consultants who have reinvented themselves as coaches without any further training.

The CIPD recommends going through a professional association for its list of recommended coaches. These associations include:

- The Association for Coaching (www.associationforcoaching.com) has an online directory of coaching providers – both individual and corporate members.

- The International Coach Federation (www.coachfederation.org) has an online screening service that assists you in identifying the characteristics of your ideal coach and offers a list of coaches who are registered with the federation.

- The Coaching and Mentoring Network (www.coachingnetwork.org.uk) has lists of identified coaches and of professional coaching and associated organisations.

- The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (www.emccouncil.org/uk/) is a large international body covering a broad spectrum of corporate members plus academic and training qualifications. It promotes the adoption of good practice and recognized standards. It doesn’t currently provide a directory of coaches but is a useful source of information for anyone investigating coaching service providers.

Finally, the executive development or short programme departments of many leading business schools are adding coaching to their portfolio of services. Ashridge Business School is a pioneer in the field and has established the Centre for Coaching, which provides coaching and training in coaching skills (see http://www.ashridge.org.uk/Website/Content.nsf/wCOA/Coaching?opendocument).

Further reading

http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/lrnanddev/coachmntor/coaching.htm?IsSrchRes=1 Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

http://www.associationforcoaching.com Association for Coaching

http://www.managers.org.uk/ Chartered Management Institute

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