

What is Coaching?

The recent CIPD Annual Learning & Talent Development survey highlighted coaching as one of the top five talent management activities. Of the companies that took part in the survey 51% offered coaching to managers.

When I saw that, I couldn't help wondering how varied that 'coaching' might be and how much value it added to the managers and the businesses.

'Coaching' is one of those words that means different things to different people. It's often confused with Mentoring and sometimes means little more than giving feedback.

Here's my take on what it means and why it's useful...

One of my earliest experiences of coaching was with Sir John Whitmore (his book, 'Coaching for Performance' is still one of my favourites). Sir John defines coaching as 'helping people to apply what they already know'.

Straight away, we have coaching defined as an activity that acknowledges the ability of the client. I think this is important. I might take it a step further.

There is a presupposition of NLP: Everybody has, or can create, the resources they need to succeed. If we look at coaching in the light of that presupposition then we can enlarge the definition to:

Coaching is helping people to access the resources they need to succeed.

The way I see it, the coach is there to help the client use the resources they already have, in pursuit of some specific goals. The paradox is this: if the client already has everything they need to succeed, why do they need a coach?

Usually, the reason why a person benefits from working with a coach is this: working alone, many people get stuck. Faced with a new challenge, it can be hard to tell the best way to approach it. It might be difficult to break out old habits, or the thinking process might get into an endless circle of non-productive worrying.

The job of a coach is to provide a process to help the client move forward in his/her thinking. Sometimes this means mostly listening and asking questions to help the client clarify his own thoughts.

Sometimes it means providing a framework to ensure that a new idea is considered from all useful angles, such as when goal-setting. Sometimes it means taking a systematic approach to overcoming a mental block. Sometimes, if the client is stressed or dealing with the results of major changes, it can mean guiding the client through a process to release negative emotions and restore the mind to a resourceful state.

Often, coaching works with behaviour patterns that are normally outside of conscious awareness.

Anything you can do really well, you can do without thinking. Unfortunately, there are also lots of things we do less well that we also do without thinking!

Of course, I'm talking about coaching where the coach has the full range of NLP tools and techniques to draw on. NLP is an excellent addition to any coach's skills, because it actually enables the client to re-wire their thinking. It creates new neurological pathways in the brain.

The more of this kind coaching a client participates in, the more the mind is re-trained to use the processes unconsciously to resolve issues before the client is consciously aware of them. The key to success is nearly always in the unconscious habits.

The aim of coaching is to replace habits that lead to stress and failure with habitual processes that lead to success and satisfaction.

And the real value of coaching at the unconscious level?

The client does not have to remember to do anything different, there is no fighting against natural inclinations, often clients forget that they ever had a mental block in the first place!

Done well, coaching is a very powerful means of unleashing talent. One of the keys to success is in the relationship between coach and client. If there is 'chemistry' between the two, then results will follow. Without that chemistry, we can be less certain of success.

So what is coaching?

Coaching is a relationship between a coach and a client that enables the client to access the resources they need to succeed. At least that's what it is in my map of the world!

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