



Executive Coaching and Mentoring – a pragmatic view

What is Executive Coaching and Mentoring?

Executive Coaching is a commonly used phrase now in business, but there are a multitude of different definitions. One that works well for many is adapted from Myles Downey, founder of The School of Coaching, London.

“The art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another, within an organisational context.”

Mentoring is often used to describe situations where a person with sufficient experience to guide, advise and transfer knowledge/thinking, gives ‘off line’ help to another.

A great coach can do both coaching and mentoring where appropriate – but it is quite rare for a mentor to have the specific skills to coach in a non-directive way that facilitates an individual to drive the learning process themselves.

The core proposition of coaching is to assist the individual in delivering effective results for their employers – through learning, attitudinal and behavioural change.

“Coaching remains as much of an art as a science - best practiced by individuals with acute perception, diplomacy, sound judgement and the ability to navigate conflicts with integrity.”

Harvard Business Review November 04

The core proposition of mentoring is to assist the individual in delivering effective results for their employers –through accelerated learning and/or the testing and development of their ideas by an experienced outsider

Why use Executive Coaching and Mentoring?

In today’s highly pressurised world, the tendency is for people to act and then move on to the next task or challenge rather than taking time out to reflect and understand the impact of their behaviour and actions on others.

The power of reflection as a core leadership skill is still under-recognised and under-valued and great coaches can enhance and substantially develop this skill in others. Coaching often brings difficult issues to the fore, which are so often buried under the fast pace of action orientated, quarterly earnings driven executive schedules.

But self-awareness is not the goal in itself – it is an important staging post to really integrate personal development with organisational needs and business goals.

360° ‘before and after’ feedback, using well-constructed approaches, & delivered with precision and skill by a top class coach, can make an enormous difference to executives determined to learn, develop and further improve their overall leadership capabilities.

Systematic coaching programmes rolled down from the top of an organisation can support organisational and cultural change for the benefit of the entire business. If people see the change in behaviour and approach from the top then it often makes buy in for themselves much faster and more effective.

“Coaches serve as outsourced suppliers of candour, providing individual leaders with the objective feedback required to nourish their growth.”

Harvard Business Review November 04

The importance of leaders developing their emotional intelligence – self -awareness, self -regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills – has contributed to the demand for executive coaching.



“The numbers are beginning to tell us a persuasive story about the link between a company’s success and the emotional intelligence of its leaders”

Harvard Business Review November 1998

Mentors can also, and invariably, do supply candour. In addition, they supply insight, knowledge and judgement built over years of experience.

Mentoring by in-house leaders ensures that the intellectual capital in the organisation is more fully used. External mentoring brings different perspectives, experiences and judgements into an organisation that might, otherwise, become inward looking and back-level in its leaders’ thinking.

The UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in their 2004 survey of its members on *Coaching and Buying Coaching Services*, found that respondents reported as the main objective of coaching the selected items listed by percentage below:

Improving individual performance	78%
Dealing with under performance	30%
Improving productivity	28%
Career planning/personal development	27%
Growing future senior staff	26%
Achieving better work/life balance	5%
Satisfying demand for coaching from employees	2%

What is the coaching process?

The client must firstly ask and answer the key question – what is the point of an investment in coaching? In other words, how will coaching further the attainment of key business goals? Coaching is not always the right tool to use.

Coaching success rates are likely to rise if the 3 parties to the process – the client, the individual and the coach - agree up-front the ‘SMART’ goals for the coaching outcomes (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed).

The individual must want to be coached – and be confident that his/her efforts to become more self-aware and change behaviours will be appreciated and encouraged by the line manager and key colleagues. Real commitment from the individual to targeted change is paramount.

Openness and directness in this 3 way discussion has enormous value – and clear boundaries around the roles of the parties and confidentiality can be established in a business like, matter of fact way. These are the key elements of an effective coaching contract.

The coaching process needs to be properly managed and coherent to all involved. Coherence means a simple but robust process of planning what success would look like and setting goals, doing & practicing, and achieving & measuring specific deliverables that are sustained and built on.

Having too many goals should be avoided – three is often a good target – and these should be included in the coaching agreement that all three parties sign up to. Like so many people-related initiatives and investments, it must be driven by business imperatives and with demonstratable commitment from the top.

Customised 360° feedback processes, aligned to the specific coaching goals, can be valuable in evaluating the perceptions of key people to changes in approach, behaviour etc of the coachee.



What is the mentoring process?

As with coaching, the client must firstly ask and answer the key question – what is the point of an investment in mentoring? In other words, how will mentoring further the attainment of key business goals? It is not always the right tool to use.

Mentoring entails bringing expertise alongside an individual to enable them to develop insight, understanding, judgement and personal qualities such as self-confidence, and to do this faster and with fewer errors than if they were by themselves.

The first decision to be made when making a mentoring choice is that of the needed expertise, which could be one or many.

If political knowledge as to how to work the organisation's systems to advantage is the need, then an experienced senior manager from within the organisation, but out of the individual's reporting line, is the right choice.

If professional expertise, such as accountancy, is the need, then an experienced professional in or outside the organisation is an appropriate choice. An outsider will bring new ideas; an insider may also help with the politics of the organisation.

Many executives want the benefit of an external, experienced leader who brings a general, and maybe, specific business perspective, knowledge and expertise: someone who can be used as a confidential sounding board when there is no-one in the organisation to play that role.

Depending on the purpose of specific mentoring, the process will differ. An internal mentor may work closely and specifically with an individual for a particular period as they step up into a new role, and then fall back to be a trusted source of advice over a long period.

A mentor that brings professional expertise will probably work with an individual for a set period of time and work to specific goals.

The general business mentor will work more or less closely with a manager depending on the perceived needs of the manager. It will be a fluctuating but potentially long-running relationship.

Regardless of the nature of the relationship and process, there needs to be a clearly understood purpose, and goals that are reviewed on an agreed basis.

What are the tangible benefits?

Studies are emerging that quantify the bottom line benefit, mainly from the USA where spending on coaching is estimated at around \$1 billion annually.

The CIPD 2004 survey on coaching and buying coaching services, also found that:

99% of respondents believed coaching can deliver tangible benefits to individuals and organisations.

96% of respondents believed coaching is an effective way of promoting learning in organisations.

92% of respondents believed that when coaching is managed effectively it can have a positive impact on the bottom line.

Manchester Consulting Inc estimated an average return on investment of \$100K on each coaching assignment. (At a return of 5.7 times expenditure).



MetrixGlobal calculated a 529% return on investment, alongside significant intangible benefits.

Both of these studies are referenced in the CIPD report.

Some figures show that with training alone (even if done very effectively) there may be an improvement of just over 20% in performance and productivity. If the training is reinforced with coaching the improvements increase sharply to well over 80%.

The Xerox Corporation found that if they did not do follow-up coaching, people lost 87% of the skills change brought about from training.

“ We have yet to find a company that can’t benefit from more candour, less denial, richer communication, conscious development of talent and disciplined leaders who show compassion for people”

Harvard Business Review November 04

Outstanding conversations that lead to valuable & sustainable improvement in executive performance - this is what great executive coaching and mentoring can bring.

About the writers

This article was adapted by Fred Pink from an original article by Russell Taylor and John Armstrong.