

## COACHING GOES MAINSTREAM

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As organisations become flatter and demands on executives increase, coaching can provide vital support to individual managers and improve company performance. However, as demand for coaches skyrockets companies need to apply greater rigour to the way coaches are appointed.

Go to any networking event these days and the likelihood is that the person you are talking to is a coach, most probably a member of the fast growing self-esteem industry. That person is unlikely to have any training in coaching and if they do harm or take money under false pretences, there is no official register from which they can be struck. Given the highly personal nature of their encounters, we are only likely to hear about their success stories. However, a new breed of professional managerial coaches is now emerging who won't be able to bury their mistakes so easily. They are employed mainly by larger organisations and their value is measured by the improvements they can deliver in the performance of the individual managers they coach, even by bottom line results. When corporations such as BP and Unilever set up teams dedicated to sourcing coaching services for their global operations, you can be sure that coaching has become mainstream.

As the demand for management coaches increases, questions again arise over the quality of supply. How can you tell a good coach from a bad one and are there different categories of coach? How does a company know who is eligible for coaching within their organisation and how can they distinguish between the coaching needs of a middle manager and a chief executive? I attended an event organised by CIPD, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, *The HR Buyer's Guide to Coaching*, which examined the challenges facing organisations that are coming under increasing pressure to provide coaching for their managers. I was the guest of Caroline Horner of i-coach Academy which provides training for coaches and is working with CIPD to help establish professional standards for coaches.

### **Support for emergent managers**

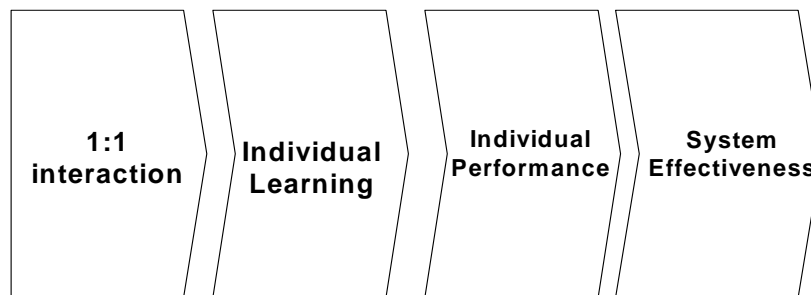
One reason why there is so much demand for coaching was highlighted by Professor Mike van Oudtshoorn, Director of Student Learning for i-coach Academy: *"A number of employees are being catapulted into positions for which they have limited experience and are often being stretched on their ability."* These fast rising managers need one-on-one support from someone who has the skills and experience to help them undergo major transitions and, in some cases, protect them from their own impulses. In the olden days, that vital support was available from work colleagues and line managers. As companies became leaner, meaner and flatter these support networks disappeared. Traditional training cannot fill the gap, hence the demand for management coaches.

So what inspires a request for coaching in the first place? Senior managers who have had good coaching experiences often recommend it to their direct reports but demand is now coming from individuals who have heard or read about coaching and think it might be right for them.

In a survey conducted by CIPD, 78% of respondents use coaching to improve individual performance, 30% to tackle under performance and 28% to improve productivity. The main drivers for using coaches are performance related and not, as many believe, to provide support with softer issues such as work-life balance or motivation. That is the domain of the life coach.

### **So what is coaching?**

There is still considerable confusion about what coaching actually is and how it differs from mentoring. Most definitions describe coaching as a series of one-on-one developmental discussions usually conducted in person, probably at monthly or bi-monthly intervals. Their aim is to enable clients to achieve new insights, maximise their potential or improve overall performance. Clients receive feedback on their strengths and weaknesses but otherwise the engagement is entirely non-directive.



*How management coaching reaches the bottom line. One-on-one interaction produces learning, leading to improved performance and increase system effectiveness.*

Mentoring differs from coaching in that it is task oriented. While a coach is generally skilled at guiding and coaxing, a mentor will be contributing specific expertise to help achieve a particular goal.

Organisations unfamiliar with coaching may need some convincing that such large investments in individual managers will produce measurable business benefits. The connection is certainly not a direct one though it has been proven beyond reasonable doubt that, properly matched and supervised, a coach can deliver significant competitive advantage.

### **Where do coaches come from mummy?**

Coaches come from very different backgrounds. The majority offer a service that's a development of their core skills. Practitioners may have found their way into coaching via careers in business, counselling, HR or psychotherapy. Some are performance coaches from the world of sport. Others may specialise in the use of tools such as Myers Briggs or 360 Degree Feedback. Management coaches often title themselves 'executive

coaches' even though they are unlikely to have had much experience with senior executives. With such diverse origins and expertise and with such misleading appellations, it's hard for organisations to select coaches on anything other than an individual appraisal.

### **Coaching – it's an HR thing**

Responsibility for commissioning coaches is most likely to fall on the shoulders of HR managers, hence the CIDP event. While personal recommendations are a reliable way to choose a coach, as the demand increases there simply won't be enough referrals to draw on. Even referrals are not bomb proof - a coach who may have worked miracles in one context may be totally inappropriate in another. Equally, one person's bad experience with a coach should not be the final word on that coach's capabilities.

Given the not inconsiderable cost of coaching (ranging up to £200 or more per hour), organisations need to develop protocols that will enable them to take the guesswork out of selecting and placing coaches. The relationship between the needs of the manager and the needs of the organisation need to be clearly established. Finance departments may expect HR managers to demonstrate the relationship between coaching and the organisation's strategic objectives.

### **Categories of coaching**

Caroline Horner of i-coach Academy distinguishes five different styles of coaching that apply to different levels within the organisational structure, starting with front line staff and working up the pyramid to the chief executive.

#### **Skills coaching**

Front line staff require organisational knowledge and the right personal attributes to deal with customers. They essentially manage themselves but will require coaching to develop specific skills. External coaching is inappropriate at this level and the skills should be developed by their line managers.

#### **Performance coaching**

The next organisational tier consists of line managers who are dealing with the 'here and now' and are tasked with delivering performance. These managers might benefit from training in coaching skills, perhaps provided by another internal manager who is an experienced coach.

#### **Transition coaching**

Next up we have the managers who are dealing with transition, deciding where the business will be going in the next two to five years. This is the level where the greatest demand for external coaches will be found. The organisation needs these managers to have their assumptions challenged so that they are better equipped to implement change.

#### **Transformation coaching**

The CEO is dealing with long term strategy stretching ahead as much as ten years. His or her goal is to position the company to meet as yet

unknown challenges. At this level, coaching takes on new significance as the coach may be the only person with whom the traditionally lonely CEO can express concerns or bounce off radical ideas. Only the most mature and experienced coaches will be able to support a chief executive and they are likely to charge accordingly.

### **Trust me, I'm a coach**

Management coaches, though subject to greater external scrutiny than life coaches, remain a very incoherent bunch. Of the growing band of management coaches in the UK (and around 10,000 in the US), only a tiny minority have received training that includes the vital element of supervision. Many have received no training at all or maybe attended one of the many five day courses available.

In addition to a lack of training, most coaches don't even have accreditation. The CIPD survey revealed that 72% of coaches interviewed were not members of a relevant professional association and hence are not bound by any code of professional conduct. At last count, there are a dozen or so associations internationally that represent coaches. Many of these are aligned to particular professions that have developed their own brand of coaching, such as psychotherapists or performance coaches.

Good quality training is now available for coaches as well as a number of university-based courses, such as the ones provided by i-coach academy, that take students up to degree, masters and even doctorate level. Organisations such as CIPD are developing professional standards that could eventually be consolidated into an internationally recognised accreditation process. For the time being, buyers of coaching services should take nothing on trust and perform their own careful assessment of each coach's suitability for their organisation and its managers.

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### **i-coach Academy**

The i-coach Academy operates world-wide and offers post-graduate certificate, masters' and doctorate degree programmes, supervision and other short programmes through its faculties in London, New York and Cape Town. i-coach academy programmes are accredited through the Professional Development Foundation and the National Centre for Work-based learning at Middlesex University. ([www.i-coachacademy.com](http://www.i-coachacademy.com))

<b>Jonathan Priest</b>	Do you have a message to articulate, a business to develop, people to train? Do your marketing communications reflect your true value? If not, it may be time to get creative with your communication.
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