

Perspectives



COACHING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT By Gil Sewell, Senior Consultant - Organisational Development, Sheffield Auckland.



From dealing with issues of under-performance, to helping staff realise their full potential, coaching is one of the most effective skills a manager can exercise.

Council managers and the HR team also recognised the benefits of coaching skills development, not just for problem-solving, but for helping individuals realise their potential. They understood that effective coaching was an essential skill for managers, but they didn't know how to go about it.

Though participants may not have required much convincing of the value of such a programme, it was important that the training solution aligned with the culture of the organisation. Anything too 'whacky' would not have worked with even the most willing of participants. A solid framework and down-to-earth delivery were key requirements.

The solution

North Shore City partnered with Sheffield's Organisational Development team in Auckland to implement a Coaching Skills

Development programme. "Sheffield's standing in the marketplace helped, as well as the fact that the consultant who ran the course (Gil Sewell) had a coaching qualification," comments the council's People Capability Manager, Beryl Oldham.

The framework allowed for five workshops, one per month. Spacing out these sessions was important, not only to enable staff to fit the learning around their work commitments, but also to allow time to practise and reflect.

The first workshop focused on developing understanding of what coaching actually is and when to use it. Gil Sewell explains: "The concept is to unlock people's potential by asking the right questions. Too often, managers find it easier to solve problems themselves, because that is what they are good at. But in doing that, they deprive their team members of an important

development opportunity, and themselves too, by continuing to have to invest time in solving recurring problems."

Over subsequent workshops, participants developed coaching skills such as questioning, listening, and building rapport. They learned how to use these skills with individuals, with teams, and in the organisational context.

The results

Interest in the programme exceeded expectations. Initially the target was for 12 participants, but a second workshop was added to accommodate a high level of demand. A third programme is now being run, with a fourth booked for the second half of the year.

Participant feedback has been excellent. So too has the feedback from the participants' staff.

Case study: North Shore City Council

The need

The main aim was to give people the skills to have conversations that they tended to find difficult. There was an issue that managers were 'too nice' to have performance discussions in a timely and useful fashion, before problems escalated.

COACHING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT Continued

Anecdotally, it is evident that managers are more effective. “We could clearly see their skills develop over the duration of the programme, because the framework was so practical,” Beryl Oldham says.

Another outcome has been that the Council’s performance development system is now being used more than before the programme.

As a result of having these coaching conversations on a more regular basis, people are working smarter and trust is growing. “Before, a lot of managers had to fight fires, simply because they were not developing

their staff. They now realise they could be delegating a lot more than they had been. And their staff flourish with the greater level of confidence and trust in them.

“But if you don’t know how to coach, you are unlikely to have the right conversations.”

In conclusion

The benefits for an organisation that flow from coaching are many and varied, provided that people commit to using it only when it is the most appropriate approach.

It can be dangerous to pay lip service

to it, as it then joins the ranks of “Another Fad We Tried That Didn’t Work”. Equally, it is not a panacea. Coaching is a way of working and relating to people that focuses thinking and unlocks creativity and ownership. It serves to draw out ideas, opinions and solutions, but is not a method of teaching.

Coaching creates thinking space, raises awareness and transfers responsibility to the coachee for the actions, plans or solutions that they create in the coaching conversation. Therefore, the impact it can have on an organisation can be dramatic. However, clear metrics should be put

in place around the introduction of coaching. It is sometimes perceived as ‘touchy feely’, when in fact it is results- and solutions-focused. Metrics usually align well with personal development plans and targets/objectives for improvement. Thus, coaching tends to work very well in organisations that have a well-used performance system. Coaching increases the value of appraisals/review meetings and reduces the need to go down the disciplinary route so often, as informal, nip-it-in-the-bud disciplinary chats become more comfortable for the managers equipped with coaching skills.