

Coaching: truths and half truths

Business coaches are driving individuals to attain greater success by helping them define goals and plans of action to achieve them. But despite its success the process of coaching is still shrouded in myths and half-truths. Chamber Member CHERYL DONNISON of Lumina Coaching puts the record straight and explains how the process works.

Business coaching is fast becoming one of the most effective tools for improving performance at various levels in the workplace.

The outcomes and those who have experienced the benefits of coaching say results can be surprising.

Positive outcomes are known to emerge even within days of the first session.

But coaching itself is surrounded by a series of myths and half truths. People often know only part of the story, having caught fragments and hearsay from a variety of sources.

What is coaching?

The first misunderstanding relates to what coaching is – and what it's not. So first off, coaching isn't training, nor is it a kind of businessplace counselling.

Training and coaching are different activities, although the skills possessed by coaches and trainers can be related.

Training normally involves passing new information, skills or knowledge from one person who already possesses those skills to another who either wants or needs them.

Coaching, meanwhile, doesn't involve any "giving", or passage of information, as such.

There's no direct transfer of knowledge from one person to the other, no teacher-pupil relationship.

Coaching involves encouraging coachees to formulate their own way forward and align their personal drive and energy with their own goals and dreams in an equal partnership.

Coaching takes its impetus from the skills and knowledge coachees already possess and allows them to shape their own future.

Myles Downey, coaching guru, said: "Coaching is the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development

of another." Facilitating is the keyword here. Some people still mistake coaching for counselling. There's a serious difference.

People may well need counselling following some kind of traumatic experience or emotional imbalance.

Blocks which are too deep to be addressed by a coach need to be handled by counselling practitioners or a therapist.

Only for the bosses?

Another misapprehension is that coaching is only relevant for senior managers, especially those in the larger PLCs or professional services firms.

Although there has been a tendency to focus on the needs of board directors and senior managers in the past, coaching is now being used by progressive organisations to help people throughout the entire organisation.

From a personal perspective, as senior coach and founder of Lumina Coaching, I can find myself, in the same week, coaching a remarkable range of individuals with a bewildering breadth of responsibility.

Yes, I do coach several CEOs and other board directors, but I also coach people at manager, supervisory and non-managerial level.

I coach people from the construction industry through to publishing, lawyers to teachers, those in the car industry to media types, health professionals to owner managers.

Some of these people run huge corporates, others are starting up on their own. Like all of us, they face challenges in their business lives.

But the real unifying factor is that all these clients have a real desire and will to change and improve.

My role is to facilitate, guide and,



Gaining perspective: Coaching helps both the individual and the business

indeed, coach them with steady steps forward along a journey of personal and professional development.

But, it's too expensive

Yes, coaching does come at a price. But its ROI can be heartening – even for hard-headed financial directors.

Asked for a conservative estimate of the monetary benefit from coaching, a group of US managers recently reported

an average return of more than \$100,000.

During one coaching session, one of my large corporate clients made an estimated saving of £20,000 to his company – considerably more than the session cost.

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Return on Investment

Gary Williamson, Dawn Dobson's manager at the Leeds Chamber of Commerce, had his doubts about authorising a number of coaching sessions for Dawn. "I must admit I was sceptical at first," explained Gary.

"My general perception was that coaching was something which applied only to large companies. But I've moved on considerably from that view since then. I agreed to the coaching for Dawn after noticing huge progress after just one session."

Cheryl Donnison, founder and senior coach at Lumina Coaching, based in Ilkley, has been holding a series of weekly coaching sessions with Dawn who has been amazed at her own progress.

Dawn said: "Working on a one-to-one basis with Cheryl has really helped to address the areas which I need to develop. The positive outcomes are terrific!"

Meanwhile, Gary has been converted. "The benefits for Dawn, myself, her team and the whole Chamber have been very significant. We've seen a direct return on our investment within a few short weeks."

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