

Going for the big one

Cheryl Donnison of Chamber member Lumina Coaching examines the blocks to success and looks at the role of coaching in management

As a middle manager, you feel confident in your role. People reckon your team's doing well. You feel your work is under control and your pay is progressing at a pace. Some of your work is a delight. Some, of course, is a bit more challenging.

You're moving on in your career and feel on top of your game. But, the big job eludes you. What is really stopping you from moving into that senior management role?

Self-doubt may well be at the heart of the matter. Coaching may be the answer for you – for those people who need a lift into a more senior position.

Coaches are trained to focus on the development of human potential. Powerful relationships develop between coaches and clients enabling people to achieve balance in their lives, where previously none has been possible. This could include gaining an edge in the marketplace, improving personal relationships, maintaining profitability or the pursuit of one's life purpose. Through a process of discovery, goal setting and strategic actions, coaches partner with clients to realise their desired results.

People come to coaching for many different reasons. Each client has different ways of thinking, different desires and skills, as well as different perceived obstacles to success. Despite coming to coaching for a wide variety of reasons, an underlying common thread is a certain self-doubt, a clear need for more self-confidence.

Self-confidence is an attitude of mind which allows individuals to have positive, yet realistic views of themselves and their situations. Psychologists reported self-confident people trust their own abilities, have a sense of 'control' in their lives. They also believe that, within reason, they will be able to do what they wish, plan, and expect.

People who lack self-confidence often depend on the approval of others to feel good about themselves. They tend to avoid taking risks because they fear failure. Those who lack self confidence, or think they do, generally do not expect to be successful at new challenges. They are more likely to put themselves down and tend to discount or ignore compliments paid to them. By contrast, self-confident



Cheryl, coaching to success

people are willing to risk the disapproval of others because they generally trust their own abilities. They accept themselves better and they don't feel the need to conform.

A recent case study illustrates what one middle manager achieved after she worked with me during a series of one-to-one coaching sessions, focused on removing the obstacles surrounding her lack of self-belief.

Carol Johnson was a successful, well qualified middle manager in the service sector with a number of extra responsibilities. She was well thought of by colleagues and her own senior manager. But every time she considered a move towards senior management, her mind quickly turned to all the obstacles ahead, rather than the opportunities. "All I could think of was the blocks to my career progression," says Carol. "These blocks just became immovable. No matter how I tried, I just couldn't overcome them. It was all to do with my self-confidence. I had just convinced myself that I couldn't really do it. There was a glass ceiling but I had put it there." Carol also began to feel that time was moving on and the clock was ticking.

Carol, aged 49, had heard about the benefits of coaching from her husband, David, a successful management accountant. It seemed that the bigger accountancy, law and consultancy firms had been using coaching for years, especially at the senior levels, although

more recently it was becoming more widespread throughout the organisation. More junior professionals were getting access to coaches and HR managers started to recognise the benefits. Those more junior members of staff receiving coaching were coming on in leaps and bounds, while more senior people were using executive coaching to achieve even bigger, more expansive goals.

David came to me and suggested I worked with Carol and she was persuaded to give coaching a try. "I thought, 'why not?' and so I phoned Cheryl and we talked through the issues involved," says Carol.

Within three months of weekly telephone coaching, Carol had progressed remarkably quickly. She felt confident enough to start applying for jobs as a senior manager. She carefully selected jobs to apply for, and applied for three. Carol didn't get asked for interview for one, and she withdrew from another after a visit to the company. However, she was offered a key management role following her first actual interview. Carol took up her new role at the start of this year.

"What a difference those three months of coaching made," Carol said. "Those first four weekly sessions were really hard work. The intense mental concentration and introspection for an hour were both exhausting and illuminating."

The follow-up work Carol was asked to carry out between each session was

also time-consuming. She knew, however, that this 'homework' with its intensive 'required reading' was absolutely obligatory if she wanted to achieve her goal.

Carol believes coaching brought three main benefits. "The first is that my self-confidence rose more swiftly and more assuredly than I could ever have accomplished without Cheryl's help."

Cheryl worked closely with Carol on building her self-confidence through a variety of techniques. The coach must always be there for the client, at the end of a telephone, 'holding her hand' when it's most needed. But it was really up to Carol to keep on track, to keep pushing the boundaries and seeing just how far she could go.

We were focusing on narrowing the gap between Carol's professional life as it was and how she really wanted it to be. She realised very quickly that there were a number of obstacles she had to overcome, and, because of this early realisation, fast progress was always on the cards.

The second benefit relates to Carol discarding a number of ineffective old habits. "I've thrown out the old habits that were holding me back, that sense of 'it could never be me' and simply replaced them with constructive, more positive habits," she said.

➤ For further information on coaching at middle management level visit: www.lumina.coaching.co.uk

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