



Fast Forward

How to avoid slow coaches

When it comes to working with coaches is your organisation buying progress or throwing money down the drain? Use Iain McCormick's three-step guide to find out.

Coaching is big business. AMP, Air New Zealand and Fisher & Paykel Healthcare know it. So do Michael Hill Jewellers, Pacific Retail and Vero. They have all reaped the rewards of coaching staff. Log onto the online Yellow Pages and up pop 326 options for coaches or coaching organisations. Yet few organisations really get the best from their efforts. Here are three simple steps to maximise value.

1 PICK A GOOD COACH

Best value in coaching is only achieved if there is an excellent fit and rapport between coach and coachee – so final selection by the coachee is critical.

- Identify a range of executive coaches in your area and assess them on the basis of experience, reputation, client base and client references.
- Interview the coaches and identify a short list.
- Allow each coachee to select two coaches and meet briefly with each before making a final selection.

Most organisations undertake these steps well. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for when it comes to evaluating the performance of coaches at the end of the programme.

2 EVALUATE THE COACHING

Level 1: What is the reaction to the coaching?

How well does the manager or coachee like a particular coach or coaching programme? At this stage, aim to assess feelings or reactions.

This type of assessment is often undertaken in an informal way by asking the coachee whether or not they found the coaching helpful. However, it is also important to measure participants' reactions in a more systematic manner. Use written comment sheets that assess areas such as whether or not: the coaching was useful; the coachee reached his or her goals; and the coach was skilled at his or her role.

It is also important to have rating scales so that the data can be tabulated and quantified. In addition, use a comments section to get qualitative feedback.

While useful, this level of evaluation does not assess if the manager has actually learned anything or whether their work performance will improve. Perhaps the coach is just a pleasant person who made the coachee feel good.

Level 2: What was learned?

Next, measure objectively what knowledge,

principles, facts or methods the executive has grasped and clearly understood as a result of the coaching.

Learning can be measured in a number of ways:

- A comments box within an evaluation form where the coachee is asked to write down in specific terms the knowledge or methods they have learned.
- A simple knowledge quiz after the coaching.
- Better still, this quiz both before and after the coaching.

Level 3: Did behaviour change?

Assessing the on-the-job impact of coaching is clearly very important but much more difficult than measuring reactions or knowledge gained. Most organisations give up at this point. Yet there are many ways of evaluating coaching in terms of behavioural changes:

- Get the coachee to set a clear workplace project which they want to implement and ask them to document both the progress and the behavioural changes that have taken place as a result of coaching. This typically works very well and is simple and easy to do.
- Ask the coachee's manager for feedback

on any behavioural change since coaching started.

- Review the performance appraisal ratings of the coached group before and after the coaching process.

Level 4: Were business results achieved?

Coaching programme objectives usually include lifting customer service, reducing costs or cutting employee turnover. When these objectives are written in clear measurable terms it is easy to use them as the cornerstone of evaluation. Options include:

- Presenting actual performance data on measurable issues such as customer service satisfaction levels, cost decreases or employee turnover.
- Asking the managers of those undertaking the coaching to rate any improvements in the business since coaching was commenced.
- Asking the coachee to assess and document the business results that have taken place as a result of coaching.

Smart solution

If this seems like plain common sense, you're right. But ask yourself two questions: does your organisation evaluate coaching like this and does any organisation you know evaluate coaching on all four levels?

If you answered 'no' to either of the above two questions you can do several things – develop your own simple evaluation system or use a web-based solution. *www.ClickTheSolution.com* has developed a simple and economical way to assess coaches. You can use the service on either a one-off basis or buy a licence to use the software. The system allows you to send out emails to coachees who complete a short online survey. The results are available to the organisation at any time.

Once an organisation has evaluated their coaches, they can rank order them in terms of overall effectiveness in the four levels and weed out the slow coaches.

3 TRAIN COACHEES TO GET VALUE

New coachees typically have little idea about what to expect from coaching ses-

sions and how to get the best value from them. Below are a range of different suggestions on what coachees can do to get the best value from the coaching sessions.

Start with the end in mind

Managers need to have a clear idea of what they want to achieve from coaching. Do they, for example, want to learn a range of practical ideas about strategic planning or want to work with someone as they transform their business? The two aims are utterly different and the coach would handle the two assignments in very different ways. The first would be handled as a learning programme with readings, presentations, small-scale implementations and discussions. The second would be an ongoing process where the coachee may run workshops with his or her staff, develop details plans and spend time with the coach discussing implementation progress.

Ensure that in the early part of the coaching programme you agree with your coach on a plan. Outline:

- The key issues you want to deal with.
- The business context of these issues and how this could impact on the coaching.
- Specific and measurable objectives from the coaching – exactly what is it you want to accomplish as an individual, team or organisation.
- What steps you are going to take in the coaching process.
- How you will monitor progress.

Understand that time is money

Coaches often have a range of clients and see each individual for between 50 to 90 minutes. Be careful not to get into too much small talk with the coach during your sessions. While it may be interesting to talk about family, sport or business gossip, this is unlikely to result in good value coaching. Astute coachees think about the agenda before each meeting.

Agree on confidentiality

Coaching can be a private affair with little or no feedback looping back to the organisation. Alternatively it can be an

open process in which the coach may supply information from the sessions to the coachee's manager and team. Clarifying the level of confidentiality from the outset will help speed up the communication process.

Ask for value-added materials

Ask for items that will support and add value to the coaching process. These may include:

- Copies of articles that the coach is referring to.
- Books which enable you to get into greater depth on any topic.
- Helpful websites.
- Web tools or e-learning tools that the coach may provide as part of the programme.
- Workshop protocols that the coachee can use.

It is important that coaching is not just talking. Expect the coach to provide a range of information and tools to allow for effective transfer of skill and knowledge to the workplace.

Provide feedback

Coaches are not psychic. They can't predict what will work for you. This needs to be developed during the course of the programme. So give the coach ongoing feedback about what does, and doesn't, hit the spot for you. This will help you to refine the coaching programme and get best value. For example, some coachees have a great deal of autonomy and can develop and implement change at an area or branch level. This autonomy allows them to try out a range of ideas for better customer service or staff development without consulting head office. Other coachees will find they need coaching in organisational influence before they can implement even a relatively minor change. The coach can only formulate the best value coaching if they know a lot about the context in which the programme takes place. **M**

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