

Compendium Notes 3: Coaching – the answer to all your prayers?

Why are you reading this article?

- You've heard of coaching but you're not sure what it really is!
- You're already using coaching in your role!
- You're thinking of introducing coaching in to your organisation, but you want to know more about it first!
- You have a coach yourself!
- You've nothing else to do today and the title of the article intrigues you!

Over the last few years, coaching has burst on to the scene, at work and elsewhere. Apart from a coach at work, you can have a life coach, a relationship coach, a de-clutter coach, and probably an 'anything you like' coach.

But in the work setting, what does coaching really mean? Put simply, it is 'an activity where an individual meets with a coach on a 1-1 basis to work on a range of work-related issues, some of which may also include personal factors.'^[1]

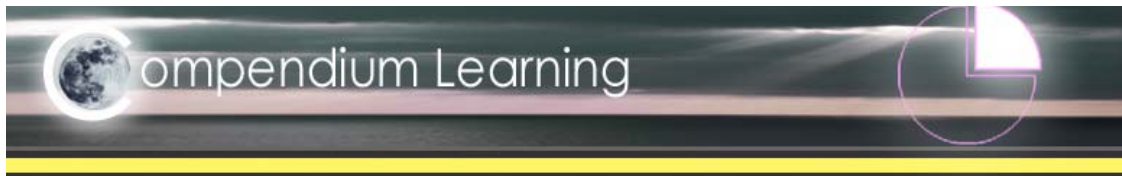
A few features of coaching:

- It's a sustainable development process rather than a 'one hit' approach. Coachees get regular development and feedback, and see performance improvement or difference quickly.
- It provides an opportunity to 'step back' and look at the bigger picture. All too often we are caught up in the 'thick of things' – making things happen – and we never make time to draw breath.
- It focuses coachees on real issues in real time and enables real action to occur. It is grounded in the reality of the 'here and now', and is practical. It enables coachees to make 'informed' decisions through the process of reflection, discovery and connection.
- It deals with root cause, not symptoms.
- Coaching behaviours can be used widely in the workplace – not just during a formal coaching session!
- It really is personal. No two coaching sessions are the same.
- The Coach may be internal or external to the organisation.
- It is energising and refreshing...
- **..... and in an environment where a culture of coaching exists, there is parallel commitment to improving the organisation alongside developing the people.**

But is it the answer to all your prayers?

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No, of course not! There are times to use coaching, and times when coaching is not the solution. Part of your developing skill as a coach is to recognise when coaching will add value and when to try a different management approach.

However, coaching can definitely add value in any of the following scenarios:

- Budgets are tight and you constantly feel you have to do more with less
- High quality performance is critical to your organisation's success
- You need to get good value from your team
- Performance development is important
- You wish your team could do more – you sometimes feel like you have to do it all yourself
- You don't have enough time to think strategically because you are doing too much 'day to day' stuff

And, as W E Deming said, 'Learning is not compulsory, but neither is survival.'

Case study: helping line managers to develop coaching skills

Coaching within organisations ranges from formal to informal, strategic to day-to-day, internal to external, centralised and from structured to organic and emergent – and anything in-between! Glen Ensor, Training & Development Manager for Development and Culture Directorate, Birmingham City Council, was particularly interested in helping line managers to get to grips with the use of a coaching style as a management tool. She needed a practical, pragmatic approach to coaching which busy managers – working in a changing environment - could adopt and from which they could get results!

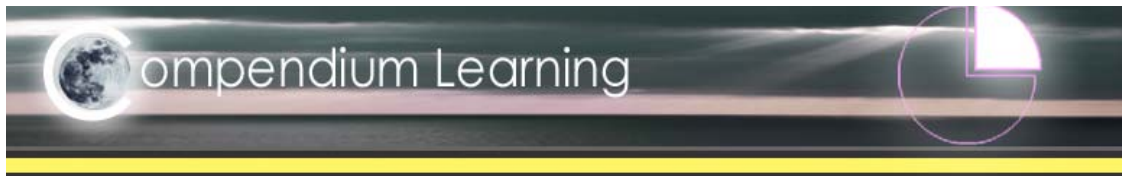
At the end of 2005, Glen launched a series of **Coaching for Results!** programmes to managers across the Directorate, run by Alex Kendall of Compendium Learning Ltd.. She attended the first programme herself and says, 'It helped to develop my coaching skills and confirmed for me the value of a coaching approach could offer in the workplace. Now I use my coaching skills all the time!' Participant feedback was positive, and since then, over 90 managers and specialists have gone attended the programme.

Glen continues, 'I continued to offer **Coaching for Results!** to managers because I could see that it worked and because people really found the pragmatic approach useful in their busy working lives. It put a coaching approach firmly on the map. The programme, which was split into a number of sessions over 3 – 4 months, gave people a chance to take a long, hard look at their own management style and behaviours and to think really hard about the effectiveness of their management approach.'

'A range of managers have attended – from senior managers to first line supervisors, and they have found that they can use their new skills at all levels. They have enjoyed the programmes, while finding them challenging at the same time. Senior managers have recognised the value of the coaching approach and have encouraged middle and first line managers in their teams to attend subsequent programmes.'

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'I know that the conventional wisdom says that it is difficult for line managers to *'formally'* coach their own staff and I recognise the challenges here. However, I strongly believe that we are reaping benefits by supporting a coaching style of line management, and this is evidenced by our managers.'

How is the use of a coaching approach adding value?

Some comments from Birmingham managers:

- *I applied [coaching techniques] with a team who were performing poorly and they have now moved to the top quartile for service provision across the city. Employing coaching techniques empowered them to improve performance, leading to improved services to customers. And Coaching for Results! is not just about coaching – it encompasses a management philosophy of good practice to develop participants towards empowering teams and improving services.*
- *It provided a thoughtful, fresh approach. I am developing and stimulating staff to put aside negativity and develop personal strengths, and a positive 'can do' approach to the job. It was a positive investment to me and my organisation, and I would strongly recommend it.*
- *I now carry out PDRs which are meaningful and productive, I am praising more often, the PDRs were successful because I enabled staff to assess their own performance and we then explored it*
- *Before, my style was like a 'bull at a gate'. Now, I'm using coaching – it's relaxed, easy and useful! I'm letting the team try out their own ideas and seeing how they pan out. I'm also building my own confidence! Very good – 5 star!*
- *When I attended Coaching for Results! I was very low in morale. I was under a lot of pressure and felt I had little support from my team. I knew I needed to delegate more but time and lack of confidence in people to carry out tasks prevented me. I realise now that I wasn't helping the situation and I now have the confidence to coach staff to take on some of the work I was [previously] undertaking – what a result! It's also made me aware that I need to praise my team and to stop delivering solution-based coaching! I am using coaching in the quality programme, the customer service initiative, in performance development and review sessions, and in team meetings.*
- *I catch people doing things right!*

[1] CIPD Coaching in Organisations – Research Insight (2007/8)

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