

The seven myths of coaching

One of the greatest myths of all time – winning the National Lottery makes you unhappy. Nonsense. According to a Mori survey of 249 lottery winners, 98% are either as happy or more happy after winning. Of those who were married, nine out of ten are still married and nine out of ten winners remain friends with the best friend they had before the win.

Business coaching is becoming one of the most effective business tools to improve performance, and where it works well, results can be seen within days of the coaching session. Coaching as a technique is full of myths. The purpose of this article is to eradicate these common myths and show you exactly what coaching can do to improve your performance at work.

Myth number one

You have to be an expert to coach someone. Admittedly you have to have strong rapport and credibility with the person you're coaching and this, sometimes, takes a little while. There are plenty of skills a good coach needs, however, you don't have to be an expert at the job the person you're coaching does. I recall coaching a regional executive within a building society. Our session revolved around a potential training session that this person needed to carry out and the planning process so often missed by busy managers. Now I've been a professional trainer for over ten years and felt myself itching to tell this person exactly what they should do, because I'd been there many times before. Being an expert in this instance, was helping little in coaching the person through the goal.

Myth number two

Coaching is the same as training. Wrong – they are completely different activities although sometimes the skills are similar. Training is normally giving someone new information, skills or knowledge. Coaching is not giving anything, it is allowing the coachee to formulate their way forward, aligning their energy with their goals. It is working with the skills and knowledge they already have and applying them to the real world in a business environment.

Now don't think for a moment, that when you're coaching someone, an element of training is never needed. Last year I was coaching someone who blatantly was very weak at goal setting. They needed some basic training on the subject. I could've launched into train mode. However, I stood back and wanted to continue the self help attitude that my coachee had developed. So that night I asked Mr Amazon to send Steven Covey's book, The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People, with a note for my coachee to read habit two. The next session we had I was able to coach what was learnt and see how they were going to apply it and use it.

Myth number three

The coachee has goals. Coaching assumes, quite rightly, that every coachee has the answer. It may be buried deep in the crevices of their mind and will need weeding out – but it's there. A good coaching book will tell you to work with the coachee's goals. In fact models, such as GROW, rely on this totally. However, my experience shows that not all business people have goals. In fact, very few have balanced goals that combine their business and personal life. Very few have properly aligned their goals to the type of person they are. Plenty have goals given to them by senior managers. I remember dealing with a manager who was very proud to show their written down goals. I delved into these goals and they soon admitted they hadn't actually done anything about them and that they were suggested by their manager.

Myth number four

You can't suggest anything in coaching. Wrong – you can, but it really has to be the last resort. I recall my very earliest exposure to coaching. I recall being trained and being shot if you told the coachee what to do or machine gunned if you made a suggestion. This led to us developing the ability to lead in our questioning techniques. Now there is nothing worse than leading someone with your questions. It is condescending and patronising. Imagine saying to an experienced salesperson, "Now bearing in mind the company's way of selling that product, how could you do it differently next time?" Ahrrrr! It would be far better to ask them how they do it next time in a more open manner. Give them time to respond, maybe probe a little more. If no response is forthcoming, follow up with, "May I make a suggestion?"

Myth number five

Coaching gets few real results. Wrong, but I would say that wouldn't I? Coaching is extremely generative. It feeds on results occurring, it revels in activity and goals, its all about doing things in the future to make a difference. It is totally wrapped up in business, it is entirely relevant to the business person, it is really practical, it is owned by the person being coached, and what's more, it doesn't stop with one session.

One person I coach, I act more as a gentle 'pusher', keeping their motivation brewing and making sure they get results. Training is often criticised for not getting real results. Combine a traditional training course with a post course coaching session with a delegate and you can guarantee that the training gets results. Train your managers to coach their people after every training course, and you'll see more results than you've ever seen before.

Myth number six

Coaching is only business related. It can be, but business people see the need these days for getting a life balance. Look at the executive who burns out because they cannot combine business with their personal life. Good coaching combines the two – it makes sure that the person's goals are aligned with their personal life and that their inner drive is used to promote their goals. Working recently with a manager, one of their inner drivers was the need to publicly advertise their results and successes. We worked with this person's goals until they were in a position to do this. What evolved? This person wrote a series of articles and had them published in their staff magazine. A public display of their ability.

Myth number seven

Feedback is the same as criticism. I've observed some feedback and, yes, it is like criticism, and you can't blame the coachee in clamming up and letting the coach steam into tell mode. Feedback is the breakfast of champions, goes the saying, and good feedback can make a massive difference to someone's performance. Good feedback can become culture within a company. Good feedback invites the coachee to discover the way forward themselves as it is seen as constructive and generative.

Praise sandwich is often used. Hands up those people reading this article if they've seen or heard of it before. It's like a First World War artillery barrage, the German troops knew that the British were going to storm the trenches as soon as the barrage stopped! In the same way, praise sandwich works. You receive some praise, and then you cringe ready for the criticism.

So there we have seven coaching myths, hopefully, eradicated. Business coaching is a potent tool used in industry and can bring about enormous increase in performance and results. The last myth, which I haven't really included in my list of seven, but is important to highlight, came about when I was coaching some first-line managers in an insurance company recently. "I didn't think I was high enough in the pecking order to deserve one to one coaching" was the first reaction from my coachee. Anyone, whatever your position, can benefit from one to one coaching.