Detailed Guidance on Coaching

During the last 40 years coaching has moved from its sporting roots into the business arena and is now used widely in organisations as a learning and development tool, largely as an intensive form of 1:1 employee development. Coaching has been used effectively at our University to support a range of activities, on its own and in conjunction with interventions like 360° feedback tools and action learning sets. It is currently used to support employees to achieve goals through enhancing skills and self-awareness.

So, what is coaching?

In simple terms, coaching is a supportive and purposeful conversation. In the workplace, its purpose is to support someone to explore their thoughts, actions and responses to situations with a view to changing those which don’t work well and strengthening those which do. A coach will ask thought-provoking and challenging questions, listen actively and non-judgmentally, and act as a mirror to the ‘coachee’ to look at issues from different perspectives, then generate solutions and follow these through. Workplace coaching is focused on achieving specific objectives and these are defined at the outset of the coaching conversation. Coachees have to actively engage in coaching for it to be effective and therefore progress is usually made swiftly and the change is often sustained.

In a coaching conversation all solutions are generated by the coachee themselves, providing a safe space for a coachee to tap into knowledge and experience that they already have. A coach is not there to provide instruction on what to do, nor provide expert knowledge or give advice; a coach is not a mentor. Similarly, coaching is not counselling. The coach’s role is to keep the content of the discussion focused and the boundaries of the coaching clear. Overall, interventions by a coach aid professional development, leading to improvements in individual job performance and, ultimately, the achievement of organisational objectives.

When should coaching be used?

Please see the Coaching Fact Sheet for typical coachable issues. Most commonly, however it is used to develop skills, e.g. writing a strategic business plan or giving effective feedback, and to bring about transformation, e.g. creating a better vision, operating with greater emotional intelligence or reflecting on teaching proficiency.

When should coaching not be used?

As the coachee is the one generating solutions, coaching should not be used if the coachee is not bought into the process. Coaching is also not a substitute for the job of a line manager who should manage, develop and improve individual and team performance themselves. Moreover, it is inappropriate to use coaching to manage someone ‘out’ of the organisation.

What happens in a coaching arrangement?

A coaching arrangement consists of several coaching sessions. The process looks like this:

- An initial meeting to decide whether to work together, clarify roles and responsibilities and the purpose of the relationship. A coachee can choose not to work with a particular coach if they don’t feel the coach is the right ‘fit’ for them. This meeting is therefore important to build rapport and often involves exploring professional history and interests.

- Create a ‘coaching agreement’ to clarify the coaching objectives, boundaries of the relationship and how the coach and coachee will work together. This sets the direction of the conversation and gives the coaching relationship meaning.
• The sessions. Regular formal sessions of between 60-90mins, on-going informal support (e.g. email, phone), and on-going review to check the usefulness of the sessions. This main stage is about progression where most of the learning and development happens. The coach will probe, challenge, encourage and enable, and the coachee should be open, honest, committed, and reflective.

• A review discussion to evaluate the coaching. This stage is about winding up. It’s important to recognise that coaching is for a fixed time and once the coaching relationship ceases, this marks the end of the formal process.

It is important to note that whilst coaching conversations are work focused, sometimes they touch on sensitive topics or feelings. Whilst it is up to the coachee to choose what to share, he/she must trust that anything shared will be treated confidentially and appropriately. Successful coaching is therefore underpinned by a good quality coach/coachee relationship.

The principles underpinning coaching at our university
At our University coaching is mostly used to enhance the performance and achievement of an individual employee. Our principles for coaching are:

• All staff will have the opportunity to explore coaching as a development option and where deemed appropriate will be given access to a coach.

• Staff acting as workplace coaches will be experienced coaches and will either hold a coaching qualification or be working towards one.

• Coaching practice is set in an ethical framework. We have adopted the Code of ethics and good practice of the Association of Coaching.

• Coaching relationships will be set in the context of a coaching agreement which will establish the boundaries and ground rules of the relationship.

• The relationship and process will be evaluated to ensure effectiveness and accountability;

• The process will be overseen by the HR Development function.

The coaching itself will consist of:

• Creating a learning environment that supports creativity and innovation and encourages coaches to seek out feedback from their practice.

• A structured learning conversation focused on existing beliefs, values and practices;

• Developing a thoughtful relationship based on mutual trust, respect and sensitivity.

• Self-direction in which the coachee takes increasing responsibility for his/her professional development as skills, knowledge and self-awareness increase.

Role of HR Development
The HRD team sits within the HR Division and is responsible for providing coaching as a form of employee development within the University. This team offers advice and guidance on coaching and supports the administration associated with matching coachees to coaches. It maintains the database of internal coaches and advises on external coaches, if appropriate. The team also monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of all coaching which they have helped to arrange. If any difficulties arise during a coaching relationship then the HRD team can assist in resolving these and should be contacted so that support can be given.

NB. HRD does not actively seek out employees to coach, unless it’s part of a development programme, so you need to put yourself forward if you think it would meet your needs. Anyone interested in being coached should submit an application (see end of document).
Role of the line manager
A line manager may suggest formal workplace coaching as a development tool and, with agreement, put an employee forward to HRD. Workplace coaching is a development tool that supports actions arising from personal development plans and it may therefore be most appropriate following a PDR discussion. Line managers should then provide an employee time out of their day to be coached and support them in achieving any actions generated.

It isn’t necessary for an employee to enter into a formal coaching arrangement to benefit from coaching techniques; line managers are encouraged to apply coaching skills informally in their role on a regular basis. Any line manager wishing to enhance their skills in this area should look into the online and workshop based development offered by HRD.

You, as a coachee
If you are considering coaching, you probably want to progress something, achieve a key objective or make a change. Typical examples are finding your feet in a new role or project, solving a problem, improving your interpersonal skills and confidence, and adapting your management style. Coaching may be especially suited if you’re aware of lots of ways forward but aren’t sure which would work best, or alternately if you aren’t actually sure of your options but think there ‘must be a more effective way of doing this’. You may just feel ‘stuck’.

Once you have a coach it is your responsibility to engage in the process from the outset. The purpose of coaching is to change your thoughts or actions so don’t be surprised if your coach asks challenging questions that take your out of your comfort zone. You may also be surprised about your responses to some of the questions. Some people think or feel much more strongly about things than they expected or find that the very thing they thought was causing all the stress is not the main problem. Your coach will guide you through your responses and help you develop solutions. You’re expected to be honest and open and remain receptive.

At all times you should act in accordance with the coaching agreement that you enter into. The onus is on you to request/attend meetings, make contact with your coach, and to take the lead in raising the issues for discussion between you. This active engagement is essential because you own the process. It is wise to schedule the sessions early on in your partnership (these can always be renegotiated); it is also a good idea to keep a record of your meetings, noting what has been discussed and agreed, along with the date and objectives for your next meeting. You may also want to set up a diary or personal blog to reflect on your progress.

If you’ve agreed to provide feedback to your line manager then you must do so actively. If any difficulties arise in your relationship with your coach then you should deal with these professionally, directly with your coach in the first instance, and then raise the matter with HR Development if you are dissatisfied. Most importantly, it is your responsibility to progress the actions agreed through the coaching process.

Your coach
Your workplace coach will usually be a trained and experienced member of staff although external coaches may be used occasionally, if appropriate. Overall, your coach will aim to foster an environment which develops critical thinking, promotes new ideas and develops reflection on behaviour. This will enable you to:

- explore the context of your work environment
- consider the issues and challenges of your role
- identify areas of learning and development
- set short term targets and longer term goals
- develop understanding and skills

Your coach may also offer suggestions and guidance throughout the coaching process and act as an access point to other people, agencies, information and resources.

Your coach will meet regularly with you and diary in formal sessions as early as possible in the arrangement. With your agreement, he/she may keep brief notes of sessions as an aide memoire to provide focus for subsequent sessions, and whilst the agenda is led by your needs it will be agreed and negotiated by both of you. If any difficulties arise in the relationship, your coach will aim to resolve these as quickly as possible. To maintain good standards of practice and adhere with the Association for Coaching’s Code of Ethics, our coaches participate in regular supervision and co-coaching.

Please note: coaching discussions are confidential, and no information will be shared outside of the coaching conversation without permission. If your coach develops concern about you however, i.e. as a danger to yourself or others, then your coach has an ethical and professional duty to pass these concerns on to the relevant persons. On the rare occasion that this arises, your coach will inform you that they are going to do this in advance.

I would like to be coached, what happens next?

- **Step 1:** Please complete the Coaching Application Form on the HRD website and send to HR-HRDEnquiries@salford.ac.uk. Someone from HRD will call you to discuss your requirements and set up an introductory meeting.

  This step applies both if you are self-referring and if your line manager/HR Business Partner has suggested coaching. If you are self-referring, it is a good idea to discuss with your line manager beforehand as you will need to take time out to be coached.

- **Step 2:** Introductory meeting with the coach you’ve been matched with. You will go through the coaching process, the boundaries of the relationship and agree the objectives that you want to achieve. If it is decided at this meeting that a different intervention or alternative coach would work better for you then other arrangements will be made.

- **Step 3:** First coaching session is arranged and takes place. Subsequent sessions will then be arranged in line with the agreement you’ve made with your coach. You’ll usually have up to 3 coaching sessions and agree follow-up actions at each session. There will usually be 3-6 weeks between coaching sessions which will last between 60-90 minutes each. Please note that either party can choose to end the relationship at any point if they feel that the coaching has achieved its purpose or, alternatively, is not working well.

- **Step 4:** A review will take place at the 3rd session as sufficient progress should have been made for the coaching intervention to be concluded. This will look at how you have found the sessions, progress against desired outcomes and assess the relationship. The coaching activity will either end or more sessions will be arranged if recommended by your coach.

- **Step 5:** Once all coaching activity has taken place, you will be invited to evaluate your coaching experience. Your honest and open feedback is welcomed.

**For Further Information:** Please contact: HR-HRDEnquiries@salford.ac.uk