



Coach by telephone?

Surely not?

Coaching is one of the “buzz” words in business at present. There is no doubt that being able to coach enables a manager to develop his or her staff more effectively than a manager who relies on the traditional “tell them how to do it” approach.

Most coaching is usually done on a “face to face” or “one to one” basis, the aim of the coaching sessions to check progress and discuss and resolve any issues. The aim of any coaching session is action leading to further success.

In today’s “hurly burly” marketplace where managers have many tasks, taking the time to sit down with staff can sometimes be extremely difficult, particularly when in some industries like sales, managers are away from the office for long periods.

Can telephone coaching be an option for the manager who is dedicated to coaching and developing his staff?

I was very sceptical at first. I had done all my coaching on a face to face basis within my last company where, after being a dedicated management coach, I took on a sales manager role to put my coaching theory into practice. I had sales representatives placed all over Scotland and sometimes getting to meet with them on a day to day basis was challenging to say the least. Troon, in South West Scotland to Aberdeen took four hours on a good day! I decided, after hearing of coaches who coached clients by telephone to give it a try and was amazed by the results, as were the sales representatives.

How does coaching by telephone happen?

Firstly you have to contract. A contract is an agreement as to why the coaching call is happening and how it is going to happen. You should agree at what time the call is to take place and also the duration of the call. Usually the calls will last between half an hour and an hour. You will also have to agree who calls who. Another useful tip is that coaching should take place while in the home or office situation and not on the mobile. Do not accept to coach someone while they are driving! You should also agree beforehand what the purpose of the coaching call actually is. Usually it is agreed that the call is used as a development call to check progress and to discuss and find a way forward for any issues that the report may have.

Secondly, the call should be focused and structured. Focused in that, as time is set and limited, there should be a limit on the amount of “chit-chat”. You should use the time of the call as productively as possible. In terms of structure, the traditional model for structuring coaching sessions is useful. This model is known

as the GROW model where G – Goal , R – Reality, O- Options and W – Wrap UP and Will.

You would start by asking the report what they would like to achieve as a result of the time spent. (GOAL) Then, quality time would be spent exploring what the situation is exactly in relation to the issue. (REALITY) Now, you would support the report to explore they could do to move the situation forward (OPTIONS). Once the coachee has decided on what option is best for them, the manager will check with the coachee how capable and confident the coachee is (WILL) in terms of carrying out the actions needed to realise their goal.

The challenge with telephone coaching is that the manager will have to listen as intently as they can. They have no body language to observe in order to ascertain a coachee's comfort or discomfort. They can only listen for tones of voice, sighs, silences etc. Many managers fall down in coaching because of their lack of awareness of body language and also because their listening and questioning skills are not as developed as they should be. A "tell" manager will have great difficulty in coaching by telephone.

Gordon McQuitty, a specialist corporate coach who has a number of telephone clients, says that it is strange at first but you rapidly get used to coaching by telephone. "It takes time, but you can coach effectively by telephone. I don't know what some of my clients look like and that actually helps, because I have no pre-judgments. I concentrate on listening to their goals and issues and support them to fully understand what is happening to cause the issues. We can then discuss, free of interruptions, a way forward in order for them to get a resolution towards achieving their goals".

I now am a firm believer in telephone coaching, so much so, that all my coaching courses have follow-up telephone coaching options. Clients are finding these invaluable in terms of reinforcing the learning they take out of the courses. The power of telephone coaching has also meant that I can coach internationally – I now have two executives that I coach the United States!

Coaching by telephone can work and it can work wonderfully well. All managers who wish to coach their reports can now do so – in more ways than one!

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