

# The Coaching Manager

## **Why the Internal Company Coach has to be strong!**

I write this article having just left twenty years of corporate life in the pharmaceutical industry, the last six years being that of an internal corporate coach. I have decided to set up my own coaching business because (a) I wanted to be free and to decide and have control over my own and my family's future, and (b) to be in a stronger position to support both managers to become better coaches and to support internal corporate coaches to become as "powerful" and recognised as they should be.

My own experience as an internal coach is that at present the ability of managers to coach effectively is not what it should be and that those people who have become internal coaches are being held back from becoming the effective coaches they should really be if organisations are to realise the potential of their people.

Why do I say this?

I became an internal coach after having been a sales executive and sales manager. The people I then had to work with found difficulty in accepting what specifically a coach was and as a result how a coach could support them. Coaching was for "people who needed help" and as such many people didn't want to be seen to use the services of the coach. Managers in authority certainly did not accept challenge from someone who was "below" them in terms of seniority or grading. Coaches were there to do the senior managers' "bidding" and as a result those coaches that did the "bidding", did not build any trust with the other employees they were meant to be coaching. Some coaches, (and it was aimed at me on one occasion) were the manager's "right hand man", a person not to trust!

The biggest challenge I found as an internal coach was being pressurised to divulge information that a coachee had confidentially confided to me. I remember on a number of occasions, incurring the wrath of my manager, when I refused to answer questions about a particular employee. This was extremely difficult for me to do, as I had always been brought up to respect authority and when your boss said jump.... You jumped! It was painful, but I stuck to my guns.

The upside of this was, that although the manager became angry with you, the employees began to trust you and I had some really fantastic coaching sessions with people after that.

Eventually, as I became a more confident coach (thanks to my own external coach) I became more comfortable challenging senior managers' behaviours and when they realised that this was for their own good, I began to see some real behavioural changes in managers, so much so, that today when I look at some of these managers, I see managers that are now actually quite good coaches!

My advice to any internal corporate coach, who has been selected from other roles, is to ensure that at the onset, you make time to ensure that you contract your coaching role. Sit down with your manager, your team, any other employees

that you will be coaching, and ensure that they realise what coaching is all about, how a coach operates, what your expectations are (check theirs!) and how coaching can benefit them personally. Make sure you manage the "authority bit" and be brave in terms of challenging higher authority behaviours where they need challenging.

Another piece of advice is to ensure that your development is ongoing. I was thrown into coaching at a time of extreme organisational change and miracles were expected overnight. "You're the coach – sort it out" was heard on numerous occasions – and this, only weeks in the role. I was lucky, though, to have my own coach. He was an external coach and did not pull any punches, either with me and my behaviours and also with some of my colleagues and superiors. I can honestly say that some people actively avoided him because he really did challenge the wrong type of behaviour. But he was also so supportive in these challenges and I found that the more I worked with him, the more confident I became in not only my skills, but also myself. He really did change the way I looked at my life and myself.

You can only have an external coach for so long (budgets etc) although I would advise that the internal coach sets up supportive networks for themselves. These may be internal (I was part of an Action Learning Set – and it proved invaluable) or with other coaches externally – get involved in both. They are a great way of learning and will be there when you need support. Also, ensure that you yourself have a personal development plan, and ensure you stick to it. As a coach, if you are preaching personal development, then you have to show leadership and lead by example.

All in all, the internal coach can be a very powerful development resource for an organisation. The selected person has to be strong, have character, and be able to deal with the culture clashes, the personalities, the politics and they will have to work hard initially to contract their coaching role so as everybody, regardless of status, knows specifically what a coach does, what a coach can do for them, and how a coach operates.

Be strong, be successful, and see yourself and your coachees grow!

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