

The Coaching Manager

“The Coaching Cascade – Myth or Reality?”

There is still a mindset, particularly in the older businessperson, that in order to get to the top, one must be seen to “do it oneself”. “You must be tough, proactive and use your authority where necessary” was one older businessman’s words of wisdom to me when I interviewed him about why he had managed to get to the top of his organisation. On asking him how he was viewed by his peers and the people who worked for him he replied: “They are probably a bit scared of me – after all I can hire and fire. There are a few who challenge me but normally I get my way.”

How prevalent is this attitude in business today? I would suggest it is definitely on the wane. More and more Chief Executives and Senior Managers are waking up to the fact that using their authority is not always the best way to motivate and develop their reports. There is mounting evidence that taking a coaching approach is the more effective way forward in ensuring employees are motivated, capable and productive. I would suggest though, that there is a long, long way to go in terms of ensuring that coaching happens at all levels in an organisation. My research of several top businesses in Scotland has indicated a trend, a trend, which, although positive, seems to have ground to a bit of a halt. Let me explain.

Executive Coaching in Scotland is starting to happen. It is certainly happening at CEO and Managing Director level. These guys are paying “big bucks” for it too! The plan is then for these very same CEOs and Managing Directors to cascade this coaching down the organisational hierarchy. The CEO will have their own personal coach and as the CEOs coaching skills develop, the CEO will coach the Senior Manager who will then coach the middle manager and so on. But it appears to be coming to a grinding halt after the CEO! Why?

I asked a senior manager if he would take me on as his coach. He replied. “I am totally bought into the concept of coaching and I can see how you can support me. I have however a mentor in my CEO”. “How well does he coach you?” I asked. There was silence for a while. “I get great advice and I respect his experience”. So, the CEO gets an external coach, pays “big bucks” for them, and then becomes a mentor! Giving advice is great when it is great advice but what happens to new ideas and does giving advice restrict the risk taking that businesses need to in order to grow?

Why do CEOs and Managing Directors in addition to giving great advice not become great coaches? Do they not have the coaching capability or does the old ego get in the way? Probably a mixture of both. Also, how capable is the coach of the CEO in developing the CEO’s coaching capability?

How can the Senior Manager then cascade the coaching philosophy and capability to his or her reports if what they are experience from on high is mentorship as opposed to real effective coaching? Coaching has to happen at all levels if an organisation is to realise the potential of all its employees. Coaching cannot be stuck at the very top and although mentorship is important, coaching should be on every manager’s development agenda.

So, come on CEOs and Managing Directors – stop hogging all the executive coaching! Enable all your managers to build their coaching capability by either giving them their own coach or coaching them yourselves, once you have the capability.

Allow that cascade to happen!

Don't just become a mentor, become a great coach as well!