

Is coaching just for tennis stars?

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Coaching has grown in popularity over the past decade. No longer the sole preserve of athletes and tennis stars, coaching is now being viewed as an essential resource for business executives and public and voluntary sector senior managers.

What is coaching? And how can voluntary sector trustees and senior managers introduce coaching in their organisations?

Many definitions of coaching have been suggested. Some emphasise its instructional nature; others suggest that coaching is more about facilitation. One definition that we have found helpful at OPM, particularly when applied to voluntary and public sector organisations, is by John Whitmore:

'Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their performance.'

Coaching is a skill that you can learn and use to enhance the performance of people in your team. Or you may want to call on the services of a qualified, professional coach. If you choose to employ a professional coach, how can you ensure you are getting a good one?

First, check out their qualifications. Where did they train? Was there an assessment at the end of their course? How well did they do? Do they belong to a national body? One reputable membership body is the Association for Coaching which requires its members to have trained for a minimum of 50 hours and passed a written assessment test, and to agree to follow a code of ethics. The association has a list of coaches on its website: www.associationforcoaching.com. Phone a few before you make a decision. Ask how much they charge. Try to get a feel for the kind of person you are dealing with and whether you will get on well: coaching is a very personal affair and getting along with your coach is as important as other factors such as price and qualifications.

If you decide you cannot justify the cost of employing professional coaches, or if you are looking to introduce coaching across your organisation, you may wish to train some of your own staff in coaching skills.

One of the most popular coaching models, and one that is well suited to managers wishing to become 'manager-coaches', is the GROW coaching model.

The GROW model is a basic four-stage model, developed by Graham Alexander. It is quick to teach and easy to remember and includes all the main elements of more sophisticated models.

At OPM, we have adapted the model by dividing the four stages into 12 steps:

The four stages	The 12 steps
Stage 1: Goal	Step 1: The need for coaching Step 2: Agreement Step 3: Goal clarification
Stage 2: Reality	Step 4: Data gathering Step 5: Assessment
Stage 3: Options	Step 6: Testing the goals Step 7: Goal clarification Step 8: Action plan Step 9: Agree measures of success
Stage 4: Way forward	Step 10: Tracking progress Step 11: Evaluation Step 12: Adjustment / refinement

In the first stage, 'Goal', the aim is to make explicit and then clarify the goal of the person being coached – what are they seeking to achieve and by when. The more detailed this can be, the better. The second stage, 'Reality', is where the coach establishes the current level of the person's performance and compares this to the goal. The difference is the gap for which a plan needs to be formulated. The third stage is creating and testing multiple 'Options' for that plan. The pros and cons of each are evaluated and the favoured option selected. This becomes the 'Way forward' of stage four in which the plan is developed, with milestones, monitoring and performance measures.

For some, this is the end of coaching. We would argue, though, that this is the point at which much of the real skill starts. Psychologically trained coaches will use language, visualisation and cognitive techniques to overcome barriers, which may be blocking the achievement of goals. It is equally important to evaluate and adjust the goals to ensure the person being coached is 'stretched' at all times, without feeling the goal is beyond them.

There is a wealth of psychological research evidence, which suggests that when coaching is combined with training, the improvement in performance can be up to three times greater than with a single training course alone.

This makes a persuasive case for trustees and managers to use coaching to get the best from their staff.

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