

Coaching: a powerful way to develop people



Coaching helped Emma to take a step back and consider what 'walking in the shoes of others felt like'

Emma, a newly minted graduate, was writing and producing her first professional play for an arts festival. It was proving a challenge – there were an awful lot of 'firsts'. Coaching helped Emma deal with these

Coaching psychology looks forward; it avoids raking over the past. It helps people figure out what works for them. This is particularly helpful when they feel stuck in a career or role, or in a work relationship. It is a powerful way to develop people (Lee, 2003¹). It is personal – and motivating – for both individuals and teams. Selecting the best framework for each person leads to successful coaching. At MWR Consulting, we use a number of approaches and techniques, depending on what suits best. The number of sessions required also varies – from one to several.

Our case study person, Emma, whose story is told below, illustrates one approach – solution-focused coaching (Grant, 2006²). This approach has an advantage – in the hands of an experienced coach – in that it can be conducted at a fast conversational pace. At the same time, a successful collaborative and motivating relationship is built. With Emma, the coach drew on psychological expertise about how people change (through dealing with the interaction of emotional feelings and rational thoughts), as well as specific knowledge of the context Emma was operating in, to ask the right questions. Knowing (the coach) that Emma was a quick thinker meant the dialogue needed to be fast. Other people might prefer a slower pace.

The first step was to unpack Emma's most useful emotional responses and shine a light on them. This reduced anxiety and tension, and made the coaching process more engaging and motivating. It led to Emma being able to design an action plan, and decide what steps she would take, even as we conversed. In this way, Emma came to see the situation with fresh eyes, and was able to identify – and later deploy – her strengths, with some adjustments to her behaviour. Here is Emma's story, to show you how staying focused on a solution can help and stretch individuals to be the very best they can be.

Playing to different audiences

Emma had just finished her degree and was both on writing a play and producing it in a commercial setting for the first time. There was a lot for her to do. She was not only writing the play but was organising sponsorship, booking rehearsal space, employing actors, designing the set and advertising the event, and meeting and briefing the media. In addition, she was managing people for the first time. She found this wasn't always straightforward – and she had no training or experience to fall back on. Emma was discontented with how things were going. She recognised the situation could be better and had some ideas about this herself.

Emma identified her challenges as follows:

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- Getting people with poor time management skills to deliver on time
- Setting priorities and establishing a plan that was proportional to what needed to happen
- Becoming comfortable with uncertainty
- Mastering delegation
- Keeping relationships in good shape while under pressure

What Emma learnt

So, what did Emma get out of her coaching session? She knew she had a number of strengths (Linley, Willars and Biswas-Diener, 2010³) but she felt her team wasn't working well. As the dialogue developed, she realised that under pressure to deliver she was over-using some team members. Coaching helped Emma to take a step back and consider what 'walking in the shoes of others felt like'.

Her coach then used of predominantly 'how would you' questions to prepare her future interactions. For instance, one problem was an issue with other people's work styles – namely, how to adapt to and collaborate with people was a puzzle in some cases. This proved to be about having the confidence to nurture people while under considerable personal pressure to keep relationships intact. However, deepening relationships is one of Emma's strengths.

POST SCRIPT: Emma's play made a profit and got great media reviews.

Emma says...

What does Emma say about the coaching experience?

"At first there were quite a lot of questions that involved finding out what was happening. Although I was happy to explain, I really didn't want to drag up the past. However, Marjorie seemed to manage to avoid this. And, even when I did touch on some things that had happened, we didn't get bogged down in them. Also, not once was I ever told what to do. However, Marjorie was careful to check that I knew how to approach things, such as how best to give feedback. What was really great for me was walking away feeling motivated – and with a plan I knew I could put into action. I was amazed how quickly we did it all. Best of all, I was able to undertake the actions discussed, or was able to adapt them to our ever-changing circumstances."

References

1 Lee, G. (2003) *Leadership Coaching: From personal insight to organisational performance*, CIPD, London

2 Grant, A. M (2006) Solution-focussed coaching, in *Excellence in Coaching: the industry guide*, Passmore, J. (ed) (2006) *Excellence in Coaching*, Kogan Page, London

3 Linley, A., Willars, J. and Biswas-Diener, R. (2010) *The Strengths Book*, CAPP Press, Coventry

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We have experience in developing senior managers and their teams – both on an individual and team level – so they can develop practical approaches that encourage positive, constructive behaviour. This, in turn, will lead to the development of positive beliefs and values. We are ready work with you to help you get the best out of your people.

Here are some examples of approaches that can be used and tailored to your individual needs:

- Individual and group coaching
- Mediation, to address workplace conflict
- Personal development activities
- Special projects, secondments and assignments
- Psychometric assessment, which can identify strengths as well as derailing behaviours and also include 360 degree feedback
- Structured module for understanding the psychological contracts in your organisation, both at an individual or team level
- Create change through conversation - Straight Talking