

Taking Coaching to the next level – a formula for cascading coaching down the organisation

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One-to-one coaching can be very powerful at levels below senior manager level, but, as it is a relatively expensive leadership development intervention, it is as important to ensure that the following elements underpin coaching provision at these levels, as they do at senior levels:

a business case - can a strong and compelling business case (eg. sustainable and measurable improvement) be put forward for coaching at these levels, vs, say experiential, project or classroom-based support? Coaching is a compelling developmental alternative because of its strong record, but is not always economically feasible vs other alternative developmental opportunities at lower levels.

clear individual talent to be developed – are there any questions about whether individuals within the group/cadre to be coached are likely to benefit less than others from a positive coaching approach? Just as with senior managers, coaching money should never be spent on staff that are *unlikely* at the outset to benefit from coaching support. Coaching outcomes are always most powerful when applied to those with high potential and those already identified as talented, strong performers. At senior levels, the starting point is often, 'this person is not performing, but we cannot afford for them not to be successful', or 'we cannot afford for them to leave'. At less strategic levels, urgency is likely to be lower, and hence the business case for coaching is likely to be weaker.

a bespoke approach to individual development – are there both broad organisational themes underpinning the planned coaching at these levels, as well as clear individual objectives, based on individual performance development needs, or is the latter weakly defined. If individual development objectives are difficult to articulate, then coaching is likely to be the wrong development tool to pull from the developmental tool bag.

clear manager buy in – is the coachee's manager prepared to put in the up-front effort to set clear coaching objectives (both behavioural and business outcomes-focused), and is the manager interested enough to monitor progress and to engage with the coach during the coaching support process? Also – is the manager prepared to set aside reasonable coaching time. If not, then any coaching support is likely to be sub-optimal to the organisation in terms of the achievement of specific business outcomes.

coach-coachee chemistry – assuming that there is a business case, that identified coachees are considered to be strong performers, that there is clear intent to achieve broad business objectives via individualised development, and that there is clear manager buy-in, then the final determinant of likely coaching success at this level is a great chemistry match between coach and coachee. Unless due care is given to creating a great match between coach and coachee, (as for coaching at senior levels), then any coaching support is likely, at best, to be sub-optimal, and at worst, unsuccessful, as a poor coach-coachee match is likely to lead to poor engagement, buy-in and commitment by the coachee.

Cascading one-to-one coaching below senior levels can be expensive and disappointing if managed poorly; but developing a strategy within the above guidelines can be a useful first step to developing, engaging and retaining emergent talent within the organisation.

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