

COACHING COUNSELING AND MENTORING

How to Choose and Use the Right Technique To Boost Employee Performance

ADHIR GHOSH

Principal Consultant, Gray Matters Consulting

Organizations have been using counselling as a process of handling “disgruntled” or “under-performing” employees – managers were expected to counsel such individuals to resolve any kind of issues that concerned that individual’s behaviours and actions.

In the past decade, mentoring and coaching have become the buzzwords. Organizations – always on the lookout for developmental tools for improving performance – have quickly accepted the relevance and efficacy of these two and tried to design and implement them.

But what is coaching and how is it different from mentoring or counselling? Is it teaching, instructing or training? So far our knowledge of coaching has been either from sports/games coaches or coaching centres in the educational sector. Then we have a proliferation of “experts” who go around developing coaching skills. Becomes difficult for the HR Head to decide who is going to offer ‘value’ for money. Let us examine these terms and understand what each of process implies so that the utility, applicability and efficacy can be decided depending on what one is looking for!

Counselling is what it professed out to be – providing advice and support when the individual faces a **personal crisis, a difficult dilemma or important choice, or a dysfunction in some key aspect of his/her social ability** (e.g. fear of failure, marital disharmony etc.). The Counsellor acts as a confidant and sounding board regarding issues that arise. However the danger with workplace counselling (and to some extent also with mentoring) is that the helper may not be sufficiently skilled to recognise when the situation demands the intervention of a professional counsellor or clinical psychologist.

Mentoring is an old tradition. It is derived from Mentor, who took the responsibility of taking care of Ulysses' son Telemachus and prepare him appropriately (in Ulysses' absence) for becoming the next king of Ithaca. It has thereafter evolved into the concept of apprenticeship (or disciple), when an older, more experienced person passed down his knowledge and skills to a junior and younger novice.

Thus mentoring work best when the need is **acquisition of wisdom**. By wisdom, we mean here the ability to relate what has been learned to a wide spectrum of situations, and to achieve **insight and**



understanding into the issues discussed. In the organizational context, Dr. David Clutterbuck (Author of: "Everyone Needs a Mentor" etc.) recommends that mentoring is best carried out by an off-line manager, who is senior in experience, has expertise in the functional or technical area and able to maintain a broad perspective.

Coaching also has a background – which can be traced back to Socrates. He took the view that people learn best when they take ownership of a given situation and take personal responsibility for the outcome. In the organizational context, Coaching works best when the need is the **acquisition of skills**. In the words of Timothy Gallwey (Author of: "Inner Game of Tennis" etc.)

– "Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise your own performance. It is helping him to learn rather than teaching him." Thus the coaching is based on the twin principle of "Raising Awareness and Taking Responsibility".


One of the most interesting developments in recent years has been the growth in executive coaching for senior executives. This is almost always through external coaches. In a study supported by the Institute for Employment Studies Research Club, it was found that executive coaching, an import from the US, has grown enormously in popularity across Europe in the last few years. Fees for executive coaches of around £2,000 per day are not uncommon. This compares with an average daily fee of £975 per day among UK management consultants. The research was undertaken because of the increasing interest, cost, and use of executive coaching, and because relatively little appeared to be known about what the issues was for organisations.

Executive coaching is an interactive process that is designed to help individuals to develop rapidly. It is usually work-related and focused on improving performance or behaviour. It is a goal-orientated form of personally tailored learning for a busy executive. It utilises feedback and offers some objectivity.

Coaches at this level have a somewhat different role. There is less emphasis on application of Learning and more on being a mixture of critical friend (who else challenges the CEO or directors on a personal level?) and sounding board. Senior executive coaches concentrate on the individual and his or her personal needs, but do not need a deep understanding of how organisations work - the politics, the structures, the interpersonal dynamics and boardroom roles.

What motivates employers to commission executive coaches? What is it they hope to gain? Organisations introduce executive coaching: To accelerate the personal development of individuals defined as 'high potential', or individuals from a minority group identified for affirmative action. To underpin the effective implementation of organisation change, through supporting teams and individuals.

As a critical friend or independent sounding board to a senior individual.

To support senior individuals engaged in wider personal effectiveness programmes, such as 360-degree appraisal or development centres. Why is there need for a formal intervention to promote coaching and mentoring? The problems with informal approaches are several. Firstly, not everyone has the skills to coach and/or mentor effectively. Certainly, even "naturals" find it helpful to hone their skills by understanding the processes and practising techniques. Secondly, informal coaching and mentoring tends to promote favouritism -- people gravitate naturally towards helping relationships with those, for whom they have greatest empathy. In other words, people like themselves. 

If you want to know more about the above topic or about our services, please do write to us at contact@graymatters.co.in