

# Practical Perspectives of Coaching and Mentoring

Report by Alexandra Chalfont

For a panoramic snapshot of some of the issues facing executive coaching you might have done well to attend this friendly, professional and vibrant meeting, where delegates are obviously passionate about coaching. This summary touches on aspects of a couple of the threads that Eric Parsloe, founder of the OSC&M, introduced: training and standards, professionalism and accountability.

Eric shared some of his thoughts: what the coaching world needs is 'thoughtful partners' not 'precious primadonnas fighting turf wars.' Coaching is a highly skilful, but essentially simple activity. It is a very international activity and he stressed a need for clarity and consensus in the use of definitions and terminology. Whilst allowing that psychology professionals do have a contribution to make, he finds their language complicated and academic, and urges discussions around coaching to be in language people can understand – 'common sense not psychobabble'. He stressed that coaching must provide value: specific and measurable outcomes are an essential component in enabling the client to recognise potential return on investment (ROI), that is, value for money. This was repeatedly emphasised by all speakers at the conference.

A particular concern is the current lack of accreditation and regulation, essential to assure clients of ethical standards of performance. Challenges for coaches today include working out what '... professional means. Should business organisations build internal coaching capacity to balance external expertise? Should they start coaching at the top and cascade up to down?' Eric notes that most coaching in organisations is done by line managers, and questions whether they would have time for proposed requirements like coaching supervision, and whether indeed supervision would be a sensible approach. He urged the industry to find a 'practical, commonsense, sensible way forward'.

**Judy Whittaker** is Director (Membership and Education) of the **Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)**, Europe's largest professional body for specialists in the management and development of people. In the first plenary she spoke on '**The professional coach and mentor as a thinking performer.**' She considers that coaching is a part of the training and development field 'whose time has come'.

Executive coaches come from a variety of backgrounds, including business, psychology and learning and development. The CIPD describes ten core competencies which it expects the 'thinking performer', and thus coaches and mentors, to have 'developed to a significant level'. In addition to detailed knowledge of specialist tools and diagnostic techniques, these include: self-knowledge and self-management; communication and interpersonal skills; people and project management skills; analytical intuitive creative thinking and, vitally, a strong customer focus, with a significant understanding and knowledge of the business environment and the strategic context within which the organisation and the client operate.

Judy emphasised that it is through meeting measurable outcomes that a coach or mentor can fulfil their purpose, which is to 'add value to the work of the organisation so that the organisation can differentiate their performance from competitors and survive in an increasingly competitive market place'. Not only does the coach absolutely have to understand the objectives of business colleagues, but also to share them, otherwise no value is given. This perceived need totally to buy into the values and objectives of the client organisation was later echoed more firmly in a workshop about an *internal* coach training programme at the BBC.

The second presenter was **Lynn McGregor**, managing director of Convivium, who spoke about '**Key issues for coaching and mentoring**

**senior executives'**, sharing her experience of mentoring at board and CEO level. Personal development aspects play a significant role here, too. Senior executives have to multi-task on a number of levels, and the mentee may need to explore such questions as 'what am I here for? What is really important and what are my priorities?' Senior executives had told Judy that coaching and mentoring has enabled them to come up with different perspectives, solutions and ideas which they would not otherwise have had, and which have contributed significantly to their success. They have developed both greater self-awareness and self-confidence and a better work/life balance.

In the first of two workshops I attended, '**Developing internal coaching capacity in the BBC**', **Eunice Aquilina** and **Liz Macann** (who has trained in brief therapy) presented the internal coaching system that started two years ago. Coaching was to be embedded in the BBC culture so it becomes the 'way things are done' at the BBC. The intention was to train leaders as internal coaches with a results-focussed style and to support delivery of the BBC's strategy and facilitate changes in behaviour.

Coaching at the BBC is a developmental, not remedial intervention. 'Coaching is an art. It is a facilitative relationship, helping managers and leaders to improve their personal and organisational effectiveness.' A coach foundation course is run four times a year, offered to groups of about 120 leaders, and is heavily oversubscribed. The aim is that on completion participants will:

- *Be competent at working with the process of coaching and delivering an effective intervention*
- *Be able to establish and maintain an effective coach-client relationship*
- *Recognise the importance of adhering to the coaching protocol*
- *Use appropriate tools and techniques effectively*
- *Understand the importance of and be committed to a path of progressive development*
- *Understand the business and organisational context within which the coaches operate, e.g. that coaches are agents for organisational change*

Ambitious aims indeed in view of the brevity of the training! This includes three days of theoretical input, coaching practice with fellow

course participants and practice clients, (including assessed fieldwork of five one-hour sessions with each of two clients), required reading and participation in a shared learning group. Constructs of projection, transference and counter transference are introduced into the material, so that trainees are aware what they are bringing to the relationship as coaches. They are reported to go back with hugely increased self-awareness. Coaches enjoy continuing professional development (CPD) through supervision and learning groups and are also offered quarterly development workshops.

The agenda for a coaching session is set by the client and the coach maintains confidentiality over the content. Topics include enhancing leadership style and personal effectiveness, taking stock and reflecting and help with thinking through decisions. Coaching around improving business effectiveness also aims to support the coachee in '... working with the BBC's values, applying new concepts and developing new processes, developing working relationships across boundaries, underpinning the dynamics of change, challenging new thinking, and making the best use of resources.'

Feedback is positive: internal coaches are recommended for their integrity, confidentiality and trustworthiness, and coachees 'love that their coaches were supervised'. It will be fascinating to see whether, and how, this model might be relevant for and transferable to other organisations.

**Professor Michael Carroll** gave the third plenary on '**Sensible supervision for effective coaches and mentors.**' He is well-known in the counselling field for his work in the application of counselling in organisational settings and the provision of supervision, so it was no surprise that material in this detailed and interesting talk was equally applicable to coaching and counselling.

The object of supervision is to 'enable the coach to gain in ethical competency, confidence and creativity. Supervision is a democratic partnership, a place for learning and change'. The supervisee is an active participant who has permission to be him or herself, who is transparent, who takes responsibility for learning, who takes risks and is prepared to

confront reality. The job of the supervisor is to facilitate transformational (not transmissional) supervisee learning, whilst supervisees are to recognise how they learn and what blocks their learning. Skills of reflection and reflexivity are vital, as well as an ability to hold systemic perspectives. Michael Carroll also pointed out the significance of the learning journey: 'We are obsessed with destinational learning. Journey learning is where you set out on a journey and don't know where you're going – the journey is the learning.'

A coaching journey was described in the workshop '**Executive coaching for personal performance improvements**', led by **Steve Nicklen**, of Penna executive coaching, and his client **Stephen Luchhurst**, Group Human Resources Director at Qinetiq.

Erstwhile head of change management at Ernst & Young, Steve admitted to a lack of fondness for models and a firm conviction that all coaches should have supervision and psychological training (he has trained in humanistic psychology).

His approach is to help his clients to 'enquire reflectively both personally and systemically'. He encourages his clients to make personal commitments to bring about beneficial changes, either in terms of personal performance or in ways which positively impact on the systems within which they work. He challenges clients to act on their conclusions, rather than to seek to avoid action. Finally he evaluates with his clients the results of their actions. This can lead to further commitments or to a revision of the results of the initial reflective enquiry, with the client changing his or her original hypotheses. (Does this ring a bell for any psychotherapist and counselling readers? I just checked against my own info leaflets for clients, where my bare-bones process description is almost identical to this, both for psychotherapy and coaching).

In coaching his client Stephen, Steve encouraged him to address the questions: Where was I? Where am I now? Where do I want to go?

Stephen took the floor to talk about his experience of being coached, and it was hearing both the coach's and the client's perspective that gave particular value to this workshop. He told us that in a coach he: '... wanted someone interested and committed to *me*, who said "What do *you* want?"' For him, the dynamics of the relationship have to

be personal, and there has to be honesty on both sides, even when it is painful - that is, there has to be a relationship of trust. He was being coached in his capacity as a leader in his organisation, but it is clear for him that 'You don't coach professionals, you coach the whole person'. Although a high performer, he found he had deeply personal issues to deal with as part of regaining his confidence, and was willing to share a little of his personal history with the audience. Through the coaching he was able to regain his trust and love of people. 'I'm emotionally engaged with the staff. Steve gave me encouragement, alternatives, feedback.' He finds that with his coach he can test things out that are incredibly sensitive, both personally and commercially. For him Steve is a confidant and, 'in a strange way, a professional friend.' Steve encourages him to think about situations in a different way, and to consider and commit to what he is going to be doing before the next coaching session. As a result of coaching he values himself more, though he categorically rejects the notion that his coaching could be seen as or called therapy. How is this coaching relationship to continue? For Stephen it is quite clear that 'when Steve stops challenging my thinking, then it's time to move on.'

**Professor David Clutterbuck, Managing Director of Clutterbuck Associates**, an international consultant on mentoring and prolific management writer, rounded off the conference by presenting his model of '**Seven layers of dialogue for coaches and mentors**'. The seven steps represent increasing depth of reflection on the part of the mentee and a corresponding need for skills on the part of the mentor. Rather than attempt a summary in the available space here, we shall, I hope, be able to discuss this interesting model in a future article in S&S.

I was delighted to see at least one conference delegate from the therapy field, Laurie Clarke, CEO of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), who was also impressed by the professionalism and passion of the coaches and mentors at the OSC&M conference. I agreed entirely when he told me that, in his view, 'coaching is an important element of the therapy future within our society'. 

---