

## **.....And We'll Support That With Coaching** **(Developing Coaches and Mentors Inside your Organization)**

*In this short article, Paul Hazell, Director PITHON Limited – and a practicing coach as well as being a trainer of coaching skills – looks at the situation facing leaders who want to introduce coaching and / or mentoring, identifies the differences between coaching and mentoring and suggests some practical considerations for introducing coaching and mentoring schemes internally.*

### **Do You Use The “C” Word?**

A company that I was working with had recently implemented a major new software system for aiding the appraisal of new business propositions. The target audience was middle and senior managers and it is fair to say that they had struggled somewhat to come to terms with such a different approach to analyzing new business. The key client contact, a Board Director, decided that they should be given “some very complex, senior training” in addition to the training they had already received. This, he said would make them more likely to want to use the system!

This was a route I was very reluctant to take. Firstly because I and my colleagues had undertaken a full needs analysis before designing and delivering the training: the training they had received was the training they needed. Secondly, the training had been evaluated and the trainees had demonstrated that they could use the system correctly.

So then, when people know what to do and have the skills to do it, but performance is still not meeting expectations, what is the solution if it is not more training? In such a situation it is essential to analyse the underlying causes. In this case, it was revealed to be a lack of confidence on the part of the trainees in their own ability to use the system. This was not a surprise – we had recommended at the start that the training be supported by on-the-job coaching but budgetary constraints had prevented the client from providing it. A lack of confidence is not the same thing as a lack of training. What technique is most suited to improving performance through building confidence? Coaching!

I recommended an internal coaching scheme in a short proposal to the client and a couple of days later he called me back;

“We can’t have coaching” he said. “Coaching is too soft. These are senior people and touchy feely stuff is not appropriate for them. If you mention coaching to them you will lose all credibility. I don’t want coaching raised at all”.



This at first seemed like a significant setback. I spoke to his secretary and arranged a meeting to discuss what he thought might be appropriate. At the meeting, he was very forthcoming,

“Mentoring”, he exclaimed. “That’s what they need. That’s what will change the culture!”

I have been a mentor myself to several people through the years and was a member of the UK’s National Mentoring Consortium. Mentoring was however not the most appropriate route to resolve this particular performance problem. So I asked him to describe for me how he thought mentoring would help the situation. He gave me a textbook description of coaching!

We subsequently delivered a purpose-built coaching course under the moniker “Mentoring For Senior Managers” – without ever mentioning the “C” word – and observed an appropriate change in the level of confidence and competence of usage of the system.

The moral of this story is that even though they sometimes use the same words, people often understand different things from them!

### **So What Is The Difference Between Coaching & Mentoring – Aren’t They The Same?**

We have found that people in many organizations have their own ideas about what coaching is and what mentoring is – ask any ten people and the chances are, you will receive ten different descriptions. Most people tend to use “coaching” and “mentoring” synonymously. In a similar way, people often use terms like “knowledge”, “Skills” and “competence” to be interchangeable. And maybe, for general conversational purposes they are; but any good Development specialist will confirm that they are really different concepts with crucially different meanings and implications.

So it is with coaching and mentoring. Coaching in its literal meaning is a specific skill set that enables the coach, through the use of skilled questioning, to raise the awareness of the coachee of issues they need to address and for the coachee also to determine ways to address them. Coaching, when carried out correctly, is a powerful and effective way to help others to help themselves and can result in dramatic improvements in performance. Coaching is one of the tools often used by skilled mentors.

### **Who Can Be A Coach?**

Being helpful and having an open door may all be part of being a member of the team in the office but do not in themselves constitute coaching. Anyone can learn to be a coach; eligibility as a coach is not a function of seniority, past experience



in the same job as the coachee, or being part of the same team. Peers, subordinates, bosses, consultants – can all coach if they have learned the right skills to do so. When part of an underlying culture, coaching becomes a regular tool for continuous improvement. How many people in your organization have been trained to coach?

### **What is The Relationship Between Mentoring and Coaching?**

Mentoring, on the other hand has a wider meaning altogether. A mentor is usually someone who operates from outside the immediate activities of the mentee and who does have previous experience directly relevant to the mentee. A mentor fulfils a variety of functions so needs to be even more versatile than a coach! A mentor may need to be a shoulder to cry on, a sounding board for new ideas, an advisor or – wait for it – a coach!! How many of your people have been trained in mentoring skills?

It perhaps follows that some people have access to both a coach and one or more mentors. I have met a saleswoman who had a mentor with whom she regularly discussed the issues she faced as a woman striving to build a career in a predominantly male environment. This mentor was like a role model – she had been a senior manager in a different department for some years - and regularly listened like the proverbial “wise owl” and proffered guidance and impartial advice. On the other hand, for the achievement of her objectives, the same person used an external coach who would spend time helping her to reflect actively on the challenges she faced and to identify ways of meeting those challenges. As a saleswoman, she was also coached by her line manager who, through his coaching, helped her improve her day-to-day sales performance.

An example of a mentoring system that generated real benefits very quickly was a client company that had encountered difficulties after they instigated a professional development scheme. Under the scheme, managers would work under the supervision of a local university to obtain professional certification in aspects of their roles. A budget was set up whereby managers would gather evidence of their performance that they felt illustrated their competence in pre-defined areas. They then presented this evidence to the university who assessed it and awarded points towards the final certification.

Some months went by during which none of the managers completed their qualification. By the end of the allotted time span, the process was over budget; yet still nobody had qualified and many had not even begun the accreditation process. A colleague and I were asked to help generate momentum for the initiative.

An extension was granted only after we had recommended a mentoring scheme. Under the mentoring scheme, each manager on the accreditation programme was allotted to an experienced, qualified manager whose role in the scheme



would be to provide the learner with the impetus and support they needed to complete the process.

The mentors were trained in the principles of mentoring and given basic coaching training. It did not take long for the first managers to qualify under the programme. The feedback from the managers who were being developed was clear. After the mentoring started, the competences that they had to demonstrate came to life and the coaching sessions the mentors conducted helped the managers to learn from the hurdles they encountered instead of being frustrated by what had previously been seen as a “paper chase”.

### **The Five Key S-S-S-S-S Steps to Introducing Coaching or Mentoring**

Our experience has been that many companies speak of introducing coaching in some aspects of their businesses but that all too often there is a lack of understanding that undermines the good intentions; they end up with coaching schemes that are coaching in name only. In a lot of companies, coaching is included in the job descriptions of many people but those people are ill-equipped to fulfill that function; either they don't have the knowledge or the skill or they don't have the time. Sometimes it is a very sad and frustrating mix of all three!

That situation of “well-meaning” being ineffective is often exacerbated further when organizations attempt to ensure that coaching happens by imposing empirical targets and measures.

For example, in one client organization, following one of a series of “restructurings” (downsizing), area managers in one country found themselves decimated from 15 to 6. This vastly increased not only the number of clients in their portfolios but also the number of staff for whom each manager was responsible.

At the same time, they were informed that they would be targeted to hold at least one coaching session per quarter with each of the sales people in their regions. This meant that for some people, they had to coach around 100 people per quarter as well as managing other aspects of the business. Inevitably, the six area managers resorted to having “coaching days” where they would spend the day driving from office to office to “coach” their sales people. One sales person reported that her coaching session one month had consisted of ten minutes over a cup of coffee, during which the harassed manager ate his lunch before dashing off to the next office to complete his quota for that day.

Clearly, neither coaching nor mentoring will work if it is not implemented effectively and for appropriate reasons. The circumstances in any case will be unique but as a general rule, the following “Five S's” will help an organization make a well-informed decision and implement coaching or mentoring when necessary and in a way that will work. Each of the questions under the Five S's is



often incorrectly answered or not considered because of the haste to “implement something”. The result can easily be a scheme that is ineffective.

PITHON Limited can offer support and advice at each of these steps or can undertake them for you.

## ***S – Scenario***

Examine closely the circumstances that have led you to believe that coaching or mentoring might be appropriate. What has led you to believe this? What is the underlying cause of the circumstances you want to change? What kind of outcome do you expect to see if the initiative is successful? Who are the stakeholders to the initiative? What will they judge its success upon? Do you have the skills to correctly identify the problem?

Beware of making assumptions as to what the problem is, when really you have only identified symptoms. More painstaking research now may save a lot of time and budget later!

## ***S – Solution***

What kind of solution will resolve the situation and generate the outcomes that you and your stakeholders expect? Don't use coaching or mentoring as a substitute for training – it won't work. Likewise, don't train people beyond their needs when they would really benefit from coaching. Are you certain you need any of these? Do you have the skills to determine the nature of the solution that you need?

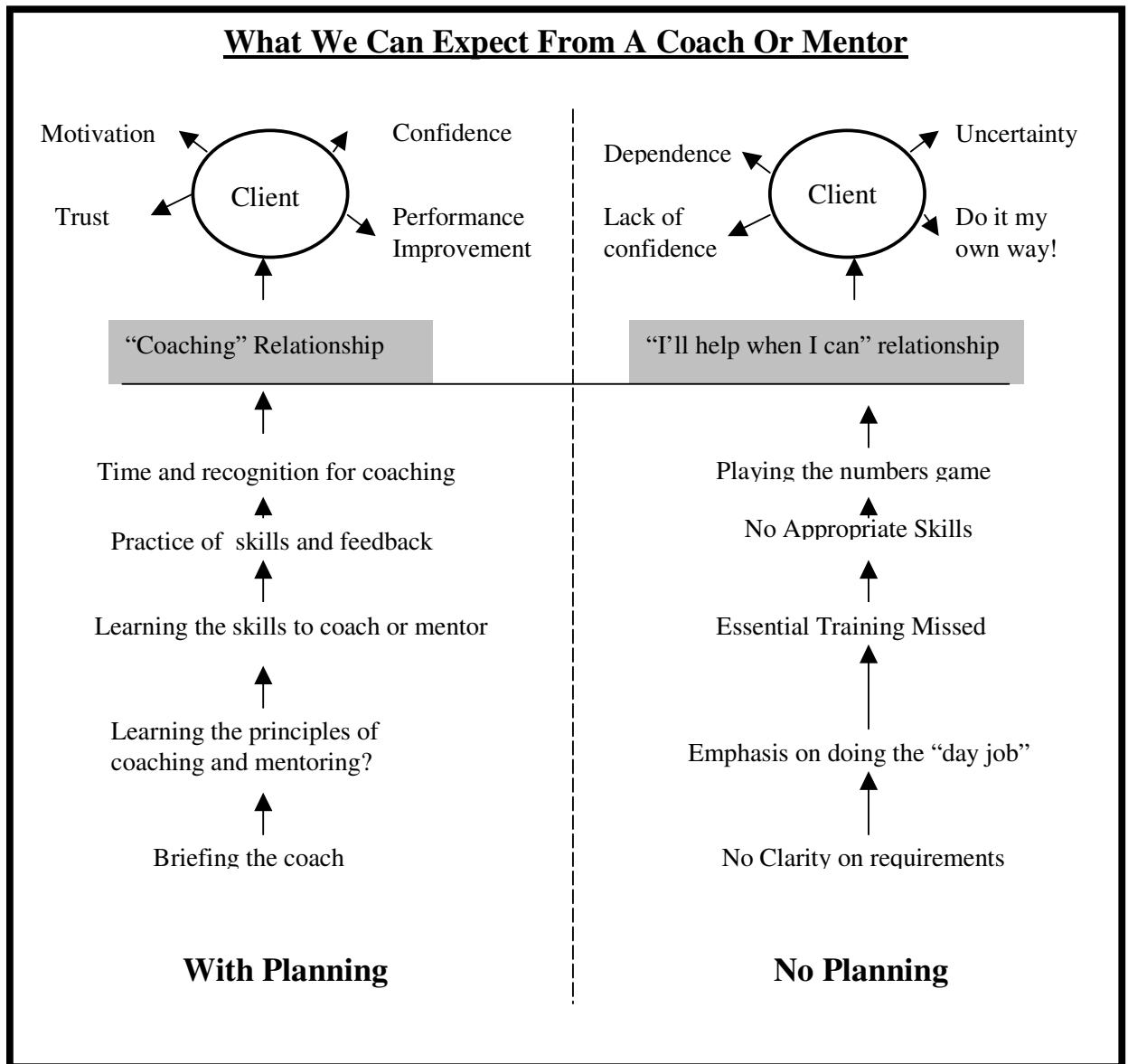
## ***S – Source***

Identify the source of the solution. Will you use internal people? If so, do they have the skills to undertake coaching, to become a mentor or to deliver training – whatever is needed? If not, how will they obtain the skills and confidence they need to become coaches or mentors?

Many companies try to cut costs by avoiding training those who have to coach or mentor. They assume, wrongly, that if you have done the job then you can coach someone else in that job!

You do not need to know how the job is done to be an effective coach, but you do need to know how to coach! Directing people who have not been trained to coach - to coach others, is a common mistake. The result is wasted time, loss of performance and lack of credence in the concept of coaching. See the diagram to understand why this is.

Coaching and mentoring schemes – like any other business initiative – requires forethought, planning, resourcing and managing. When good intentions are the only drivers, then the initiative is like trying to maintain a computer system with no IT specialists! However, when competently implemented, coaching is one of the most effective ways of gaining performance improvement and mentoring can work wonders for motivation, commitment and long-term professional development.



## S – Scope

Be clear on the purpose and scope of any arrangement you set up.

The first concern of coaches and mentors must be their “clients”: the coachees and mentees with whom they work. Does the remit include just performance improvement, or perhaps also work-life balance or career management? Will coaches or mentors be required to travel or perhaps to meet the client’s customers? Do you need to secure company confidentiality agreements from the coaches and mentors? What is the process to be followed if it becomes apparent to a coach or mentor that the client’s interests no longer fit with those of the employing company?

Consider here also the length of commitment of the arrangement. Does it specify a certain number of hours, or meetings? This period must be long enough for the principal and client to establish a trusting working relationship or the desired results will not be generated.

The importance of being clear on the scope and responsibilities of these relationships was highlighted in the following example. One of our coaches was introduced to a new coachee under the company’s “high flyer” scheme. It became apparent to the coach after a couple of meetings that the coachee was somewhat disenchanted with the company and was also restless about the long hours he was spending in the city at the expense of his family. He was seriously considering leaving the company.

The terms of the coaching contract clearly stated that the coach’s first loyalty was to the coachee. The coachee had a clearly defined fast career path if he stayed but had also been head-hunted by two other companies. The coach worked with the coachee to identify the option that offered the coachee the best all-round benefits for him and his family. They examined each option, including the options for resolving his problems with the current employer. The favoured option emerged to be the job being offered by one of the head-hunters. The coach and coachee then worked together to organize how the coachee could plan his exit without causing unpleasantness or undue inconvenience to the current employer.

The final outcome was that he left on good terms with the senior management team of the employing company – with the door open to return to them if his needs changed in the future. He went on to introduce his new employer to his old one and the new employer became a new client of the old employer. The coachee was appointed as a key account manager to look after the old employer!

The key points here of course are that the coach knew that the scope of the coaching contract was not limited solely to the coachee’s role in the company and was also clear that his duty was to the coachee before the employing company. Because of this clarity, the employing company also gained from what could have been an acrimonious split and a difficult situation for the coach.



## **S - Situation**

Even with the best of intentions, an arrangement will not work if it has to be conducted “off the side of the desk”.

Meetings need to be painstaking and substantial enough to delve into the client’s issues in some depth. Impromptu, 10-minute sessions can be useful to help overcome some routine business hurdles but should not be the foundation of the relationship. Usually, face-to-face meetings are the most effective although we frequently become involved in telephone sessions. Sessions may last anything from an hour to several hours depending upon the nature of the issues being discussed.

All these things take time: time for preparation, time for travel, time for meetings and time to maintain confidential notes. If you are using internal coaches and mentors, what proportion of their time will they spend engaged in working with their “clients”? How will this aspect of their performance be built into their objectives and performance appraisals? If no formal allowances are made then the best you can expect is token commitment – “lip service” as the British call it.

On the other hand, where the need for time and confidentiality is recognized and quality coaching and mentoring takes place, the rewards to the sponsoring company can be great.

### **In Summary**

Coaching and mentoring are two distinct but related roles. They are trust-based and require the right circumstances to work. They are also like any other tools in any field of work; they are good for the right purpose but should not be viewed as a cure for all ills, nor as a substitute for good management or training.

Setting up an internal coaching or mentoring scheme can deliver enormous financial and well-being benefits for the sponsoring company as well as for the client individuals but only where it is set up well and the coaches and / or mentors are appropriately skilled. People do not become competent coaches or mentors simply by having it added to their job descriptions, any more than they could become brain surgeons by being given a white coat!

In PITHON we frequently work with our clients on a range of simultaneous levels: helping them to diagnose issues or introduce changes, designing and delivering training and supporting the solutions and the transfer of those solutions to the workplace through coaching. Our coaching faculty are practicing coaches in their own businesses – that is why we use them – and are often mentors to clients and colleagues.



Thus PITHON is well-placed to help you consider the implications of introducing a coaching or mentoring scheme in your company and can offer assistance, advice or training in the necessary skills as you implement the scheme.

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