



COACHING

"Sarah has just moved into a new role and appears to be floundering. This is odd because she was on a clear career path and was one of our stars. What's happening?"

"Tim is one of our best data analysts. He is really switched-on, has all the right skills and is technically-savvy. We want to grow him into a management position, but don't think that he's ready for it just yet. But he might get bored and move on. We can't afford to lose him. What should we do?"

These are typical examples that we come across in our discussions with clients. And, yes, these are situations that are very responsive to sound coaching programmes.

But firstly we should examine exactly what coaching is (and isn't) – and hopefully de-mystify a few myths along the way.....

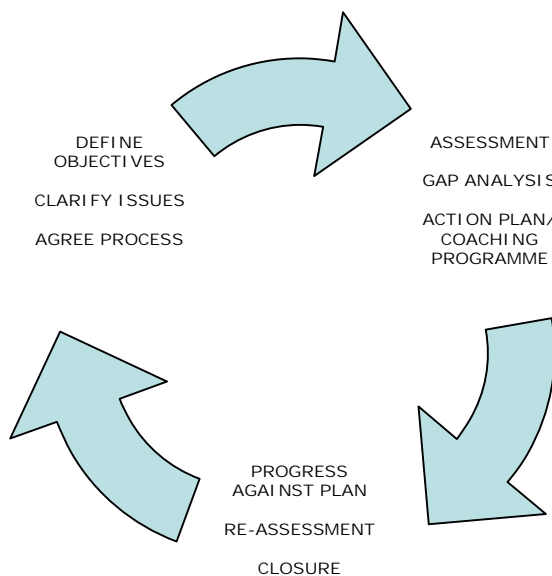
Firstly, it is not counselling. Counselling is a therapeutic process that involves looking retrospectively over one's life events in order to discover causes of problems and what elements may be in place which prevent the individual from moving on – or repeating the same 'mistakes' – and putting in place strategies to address and resolve those. Conversely, coaching focuses on "what is" (not what caused it) and looks ahead. *(It is possible that some Coaches are also Counsellors – but this is not typical. In those cases however, the Coach/Counsellor is very clear about what approach they are using, and the demarcation points around them).*

Having said that, Coaching has also become a popular vocation for some. Quite a number of people appear to be jumping on that bandwagon, and offering many services such as 'life coaching', 'holistic coaching' and so forth.

Let us be very clear here, our view is that coaching should only be undertaken by qualified, experienced professionals, using sound methodologies and tools. And by "tools", we are not referring to swinging crystals or tarot cards!

Often we are brought in by a client organization to work with a (third party) Manager or staff member. However we can also be asked to work directly with a representative from that organization, in which case it is probably the Chief Executive or a General Manager. Either way, the approach is thus:

- Ascertain the perceived problem/ challenge or area for development
- Review that with the identified individual
- Agree on method, process and confidentiality
- Check levels of comfort, trust and chemistry
- Carry out an assessment (often this is psychometric testing, but may include structured interviews, observations, career reviews, and so forth)
- Feedback and discuss those findings
- Define personal goals/ gaps/ time frames
- Establish a developmental action plan
- Carry out coaching programme
- Review against objectives (ongoing)
- Ensure that client is kept informed of progress, as agreed
- Re-assess against original assessment tools
- Agree closure.



Typically coaching has been used to 'fix problems', but it is being increasingly used for developmental purposes, as highlighted in our second example. We will look at both types in more detail.

It is very common for individuals, particularly those in technical industries such as IT or engineering, to confide that the most difficult problem to master in their day-to-day work environment is how to manage people. It is also ironic that we still seem to believe that the only path to success in any organization is vertical! How often do we see highly effective teachers and nurses, for example end up in roles which are nothing more than glorified administrators?

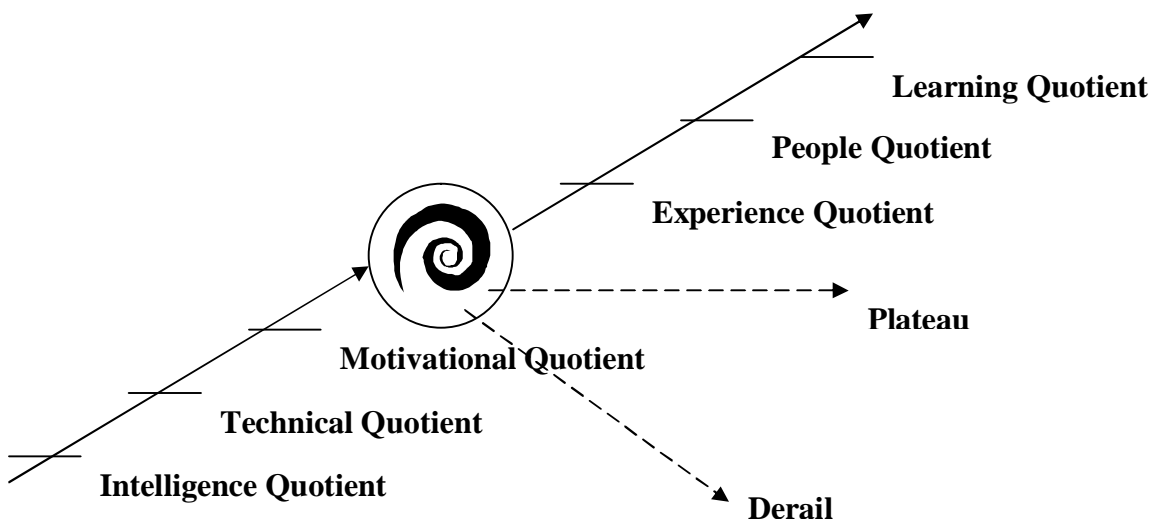
Therefore it is not surprising that the most common type of situation that Coaches are called upon to resolve are the so-called "soft" issues – the people problems.

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These of course are the most difficult, and require a thorough understanding of the coachee, other persons who are impacted, the organization (size, structure, operating style and both internal and external pressures), the environment in which this occurs, triggers for the individuals, which to some extent requires an appropriate understanding of the 'whole' person.

Working effectively with others is being recognized as becoming increasingly important in the work environment. It has been said for example, that it is your IQ and technical skills that gets you your job, but your EQ that enables you to progress in your career. Those who are unable to develop their 'emotional intelligence' skills are likely to find that their career paths become stalled.

LEADERSHIP SUCCESS MODEL



More recently organizations have understood the need to 'grow' and invest in their people. From a pragmatic point of view, this is very pertinent from a Talent Retention perspective. In the example cited above an organization of wisdom could make sure that they invested in their people by ensuring that they had understood what Tim's career aspirations were, what direction their business was headed in and how the two might come together. For example it may be appropriate for Tim to head into a Project Management role. What up-skilling would this require both in practical/technical as well as basic management and people management skills?

The company and Tim could work on this now – with a clear developmental target and plan put in place. This would keep Tim focused and committed, with an ensuing set of increased skills and growth strategies in place for the company. Of course, there is no guarantee that Tim will stay. But there again, there is no guarantee that anyone will stay. At least in this way, the company will be held in high esteem for its positive, pro-active stance, Tim may be more inclined to stay – and even return should the opportunity arise!

Once again we emphasise the need for robust tools and procedures. It should be clear what development needs are being met – and how this will be assessed. Progress should be measured against these measures.

Coaching should be made available for all people at all levels – as we were told by a coachee just the other day “I was a real cynic – I couldn’t imagine why I should need coaching. Now if I’m in the situation again and I see someone that I think could benefit from coaching – and they reject it. Well, I really wonder where they’re coming from”.

For further information about how coaching can benefit your organization contact Ann Ryder at ann@heliumnz.co.nz