



Linda Aspey

## Give Credit To Coaching

Organisations are turning to coaching as a solution to surviving and thriving during the current economic downturn. *Linda Aspey* explores.

**In these extraordinary circumstances, while politicians and economists debate the global credit crunch, the reality closer to home is that many people are probably feeling stretched to their limits.**

Perhaps you're looking at strategic options, which might involve massive change in what you do as a business, how and where you do it and with whom. Or perhaps you're tasked with making cost savings, so you're assessing roles for redundancy, renegotiating supplier deals, managing bonus expectations; and doing all of these while keeping team productivity and motivation high. Or perhaps your performance is under the spotlight, and you're being asked to achieve better results but with fewer resources, making some days feel like an uphill struggle. Whichever way we look at it, the heat is on for leaders, managers and staff alike.

In such a climate, it may seem contradictory to introduce coaching, with its additional demands on time and money, and yet it's the honing of critical skills that is essential when the going gets tough.

Consider what skills you're currently using more of – for example, making tough decisions, influencing, collaborating, prioritising, managing change, breaking bad news or creating calm. These all require you to be consistently working at your best. Coaching provides a focused forum with time and space for you to address the issues, share your thinking, debate the options and

plan strategies. The reflective process of coaching is pivotal to achieving success and countering the likelihood of mistakes when adrenaline and emotions are running high. I have noticed that our clients are often the high achievers in their company – and they know sustaining that requires the ability to step back and to focus at the same time, and the determination to make things better even when faced with setbacks.

And importantly, because coaching is based around organisational as well as individual and team goals, results can be tracked, enabling everyone to see progress as it's being made, which also boosts motivation and morale.

### So how does it work?

Great coaching provides a confidential, honest, trusting and direct relationship with an objective, supportive coach, who challenges and encourages people to identify the resources they have in themselves and apply these at work. This has a domino effect on those around them – and as Plutarch of ancient Greece reputedly said, 'What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality.'

Whether through one-to-one sessions or with teams, coaching helps people to develop insight, to set clearer goals, make better decisions, and think about the conversations that will get results in the short and long term.

Peak performance rests firmly on the way that we deal with others. And yet in today's technologically-driven world, organisations can forget that when people are in front of computer screens all day long, it erodes their ability to manage often highly complex relationships with their colleagues. The pulse that runs through organisations is that of the people working there, and as we get most things done through relationships, rather than technology, it's critical that we know how

to give and to get the best from the people around us.

### Who can coach?

Anyone with a positive mindset and a genuine interest in people can develop coaching skills. Key elements include the ability to attentively listen without interrupting, to stay focused, to think of the bigger picture, to ask more questions than to give opinions, to provide support and when needed to constructively challenge self-limiting attitudes. Increasingly, organisations are developing a culture that encourages people to use coaching skills in their day-to-day interactions, because they can see the positive effect it has on performance.

Using coaching skills however is different to being a coach. For example, as a line manager it's hard as coach to be objective with an individual if you're also responsible for managing their performance. The value of an external coach is that they bring the necessary objectivity to the process, and specialist training in understanding organisations and human nature.

### The bottom line

Coaching is a powerful performance development tool that will help people raise their game. When equipped with sufficient self-knowledge, people are in a stronger position to be effective and resilient. When organisations value people, those people will value others – and the outcomes of those generative relationships are highly productive businesses.

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