

“Coaching can work wonders for the whole team”



Who is going to get the job of managing the Republic of Ireland’s football team? That is the question many are asking today in contrast to the 1960’s when (at least as far as rugby was concerned) the Irish Team didn’t have a coach. It had a bunch of “Alec-a-do’s” who travelled with the team and one or two who had played for the international team took a couple of training sessions and basically that was it! That was the extent of the coaching. Now-days it is a totally different ball game and international teams often have a Head Coach with several specialist coaches, all charged with the task of working individually or collectively over many months so that performance on the day is maximised. Nothing is left to chance and no matter how good the players are they have to have a coach. Even Tiger Woods and David Beecham. But why are we so slow to apply this form of performance enhancement in the business arena, particularly here in Northern Ireland. Why do we, both managers and staff, shy away from this very effective catalyst for improving performance? Why do we refuse to accept a helping hand? Business organisations need to rethink how everyone could benefit from changing their mind sets and embarking on this effective method of increasing individual and team performance:

1. **Coaching is a technique that improves performance and employee development:**

Remember that the most effective learning takes place primarily through experience and when a coach guides this, an employee can become more effective more quickly. You see employees who are working at less than their potential are expensive assets, or possibly liabilities. This is not to knock formal training as this has its place and is particularly effective when imparting knowledge of a technical or management nature. But in today’s global economy managers need to do much more than merely ensure that they and their teams are adequately trained to do their jobs. They need to widen areas of responsibility and expertise of the team. Coaching is an excellent technique that helps achieve both performance improvement and employee development.

2. **Coaching takes time but is a short-term investment with a long-term gain:**

Experience would suggest that in Northern Ireland business as a whole sees coaching still as an unnecessary cost, not an investment. Management fail to realise that as employees become more independent then managers have more time to concentrate on their roles: planning, organising, maintaining an overview of the tasks being completed and the teams performance and monitoring the achievements of agreed objectives. Organisations also have a much better chance of recruiting and retraining employees if those employees know where they stand and what is expected of them, realise that they are valued despite being challenged and know where they are going and are given feedback on their progress. But this takes time and must be built on trust and open two-way communication.

3. Coaching is much more than mentoring:

A Coach is an external facilitator who helps clarify the situation, set goals, explore options, encourage the identification of solutions and opportunities, provide feedback and assist with action planning. A Mentor on the other hand is an internal supporter who provides reassurance, personal reflective space and insights into networking. While both perform vital roles coaching requires much greater experience and skills than a mentor and should undergo training. After all isn't this what happens in most sports and the coaching "badge" gives the coach credibility. Often companies claim to have a "coaching culture" when really all they are doing is allocating a person who has "done the job" but who has not been trained, or have the experience to be a coach.

4. Coaching styles can vary depending on the situation:

The successful coach will need to consider which management style to adopt. At one end of the spectrum is the "tell approach" and at the other is the "questioning approach". In between these is a range of styles, which can be used such as the "consultative approach". It is felt the questioning approach is the most productive as this delves into the employee's experience and as the relationship becomes more established, learning happens more easily while at the same time confidence and capability are built. But the ability of the coach to identify the appropriate style and have the confidence to change styles (depending on the ability and mental state of the person being coached) depends on experience and competency.

5. Coaching follows the principles of sports coaching:

While coaching is associated with sport it now has a much wider role because the same principles apply – even in business. The main difference however is that in the working environment it can be less physical for both the coach and the "player". In other ways it is very similar. For example in golf the coach does not hit the ball (in business carry out the role) but guides and supports the player.

This is done at two levels. The first and most obvious of these is on technique (or how to perform the role). The second (and this is less obvious) is all to do with the mental state to ensure that the player has the confidence to perform to his/her best ability. If the golfer is tense and worried (s)he is unlikely to play well. The important thing to remember is that no matter how good the managers or employees are they can always do better.

6. Business coaching will be effective if, for example, the following are in evidence:

- There is mutual respect between coach and employee
- The coaching sessions are calm and undisturbed
- Each session has clear and quantifiable goals and is time bound at start and finish
- Questions are non-judgemental in tone and content, easily understood and open ended

- Frequent paraphrasing of employee comments ensures misunderstandings are minimised
- Insights and action points are recorded so as they are not lost
- Employees are asked to commit themselves to action points
- Follow up support is offered where appropriate

So if you want a helping hand to further improve your performance then coaching can be very effective. But this is not a quick-fix solution so choose carefully your Coach and then give it your all.