

EFFECTIVE COACHING: KEY-FACTORS THAT DETERMINE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A COACHING PROGRAM

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Abstract:

The present paper intends to focus on determining the key factors of an efficient coaching program. This type of program usually implies several parties, and each, on its own, influences the final effectiveness of the program. When accessing coaching services the client might ask whether he is making the right decision, whether that is the right services supplier for its needs, or not. How can one determine if the coaching session or program was efficient, and how can one determine if the coaching has reached its goals? These are the main issues that this paper intends to explore. After defining the concept of coaching, based on the relevant literature regarding the subject, the author will point out the key factors that determine an efficient coach and the factors that represent the client's contribution to the effectiveness of the coaching program. The conclusions of this paper will evolve around the necessity to best manage the factors that influence the coaching program, in order to obtain the desired added value within the company, where such programs are acquired for the human capital.

Keywords: coaching, efficiency, management, entrepreneurship

1. WHAT IS COACHING?

Coaching services have grown exponential in the last decade, with a trend from west to east of integrating such services in all the fields of our lives. More and more the corporate world is turning to such services for their employees, either in house or supplied by an external party, and still there are question marks regarding its efficiency, its advantages, and its process.

So, before exploring the efficiency factors of coaching it is only natural to firstly define the subject and clear the confusion with similar subjects such as mentoring and consultancy.

According to Whitmore (2008), coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

Zeus and Skiffington (2008) state that coaching is a conversation between the coach and its client in a productive, goal oriented way; Coaching is learning – through different coaching techniques the client starts to autocorrect (learning to change his own behavior) and to become auto-productive; Coaching means much more asking the right questions than giving answers. Coaching implies change and transformation.

According to Gallway (2011), coaching can be defined as the facilitation of mobility. It is the art of creating the environment - through conversation and a way of being - that facilitates the process by which a person can move toward desired goals in a fulfilling manner.

Bermes (2007) defines coaching as a non-directive, professional process that helps individuals clarify values, strengths and priorities. Coaches help clients figure out what they want (in any area of life), set goals for getting there, and help them overcome the obstacles that get in their way.

According to Fielden (2005) in coaching the coach is required to ask questions, explore and probe, and to allow the client to find solutions to problems. This means that "effective coaches enable individuals to go beyond their previous boundaries." (Fielden, 2005, 3)

One can easily see that there are a lot of definitions regarding coaching services, and each author and/or coach may come with its own definition, but at the end of the day the idea is similar and it refers to the accompaniment of the client's dialogue towards reaching the desired results and goals.

Of course, coaching as part of knowledge services, and through the experience of defining coaching to potential clients, one can see that most often, coaching is mistaken for mentoring or consulting. This is why the author finds it suitable to portray the following tables that shine a bit more light on the differences between coaching, mentoring and consulting.

Table 1 portrays the differences between coaching and consulting in regards to the objective, expertise, who identifies the issue, directive or non-directive approach, particular skills of the services supplier, the focus of the process as well as the duration of the process. Both services require "change", are goal and solution oriented. Both target enhancing the organizational performance. There appear to be many common competencies/skills required for success in the capacities of both coaching and consulting: emotional intelligence, creative/critical thinking, interpersonal and communication skills, etc. The relationship between the incumbent and the customer will most likely depend on the situation, as well as the preferred working style of both parties. According to Van Genderen (2014), coaching and consulting, whilst not being identical professions – are also not mutually exclusive, and are far from being mere overlaps. Their core purposes are both to improve professional performance via human beings.

Table 1: Differences between coaching and consulting

Coaching	Consulting
The objective can range from: human change, behavioral modification, personality development, fostering cognitive ability, self-directed learning, and growth through challenge.	The objective can cover a broad ground, e.g. executive support, image/brand creation/maintenance/ modification, profitability, quality, product, service.
The topic/ problem is identified by the client	The topic/ problem is left to the consultant to distinguish.
The coach doesn't need to hold the expertise	The consultant is one that holds the expertise, who can analyze, identify, recommend, and implement the desired changes. He is the specialist within an area.
The coach has a non-directive approach	The consultant exercises his content knowledge in a highly directive way, maintaining a professional relationship with the client, based on a problem solving issue or dilemma.
Coaching skills – Ability to understand/ employ the coaching process, the interaction between awareness/responsibility, deep listening, and effective questions. A coach must have the personal skills: self-esteem, regard for others, self-awareness, awareness of others, emotional resilience, personal power, goal directedness, flexibility, invitation to trust, balanced outlook, emotional expression and control, conflict handling	Consulting skills – examine the organization, understand the structure, assess the nature of power and politics, isolate the important factors, use related business practices and creativity to suggest solutions. A consultant must have the personal skills: self-confidence, courage, initiative, perseverance, ability to listen, ability in oral and written communication, ability to teach people, ability to motivate and persuade, and emotional maturity. Technical skills – knowledge and experience in a technical subject
A coach asks questions goal oriented. Is promoting discovery.	A consultant gives answers and solutions. Is oriented on solving.
Coaching process regards all aspects of the client's life	Consultancy regards work oriented aspects
Focuses on "you"	Focuses on "me"
Promoting interdependence	Promoting dependence
Focus attention on underlying motivation the compels people toward effective relationships through deep listening and acceptance of wholeness;	Contribute new knowledge and technical competence for creating organizational results
Model and impart unconditional curiosity that creates awareness, accesses hidden strengths and generates clarity and alignment;	Provide objective research and analytical assessment upon which to base relevant content recommendations for change.
Partner with leaders to co-create an environment for direct communication, powerful questions and team work that is the source of improved performance.	Co-create answers and action plans for individuals and teams to create and manage knowledge as well as implement change.

Source: Van Genderen (2014), Zeus & Skiffington (2008), Homan Blanchard & Miller (2010), Hermel & Svasta (2013)

Olivero O.(2014) defines mentoring as being a continuous and dynamic feedback process between two persons in order to create a relationship in which one shares knowledge, skills and perspective in order to care for the other person's personal and professional growth.

Holliday M. (2001) specifies mentoring as being a process meant for the employees whose performance is above average for widening their perspective and giving them more options for consideration in order to plan their careers and for the organization to plan the succession and retention. It also offers two key words that describe the mentoring process: to instruct and to guide.

The coach is oriented to change as opposed to mentor that is oriented towards growth. Table 2 shows the differences between coaching and mentoring

Table 2: Differences between Coaching and Mentoring relationships

Coaching	Mentoring
Relationship generally has a set duration	Ongoing relationship that can last for a long period of time
Generally more structured in nature and meetings are scheduled on a regular basis	Can be more informal and meetings can take place as and when the mentee needs some advice, guidance or support
Short term (sometimes time-bounded) and focused on specific development areas/issues	More long-term and takes a broader view of the person
Coaching is generally not performed on the basis that the coach needs to have direct experience of their client's formal occupational role, unless the coaching is specific and skills focused;	Mentor is usually more experienced and qualified than mentee. Often a senior person in the organization who can pass on knowledge, experience and open doors to otherwise out of reach opportunities
Focus is generally on development/ issues at work	Focus is on career and personal development
The agenda is focused on achieving specific and immediate goals	Agenda is set by the mentee, with the mentors providing support and guidance to prepare them for future roles
Coaching revolves more around specific development areas/issues	Mentoring revolves more around developing the mentee professionally

Source: Fielden, 2005 p. 5

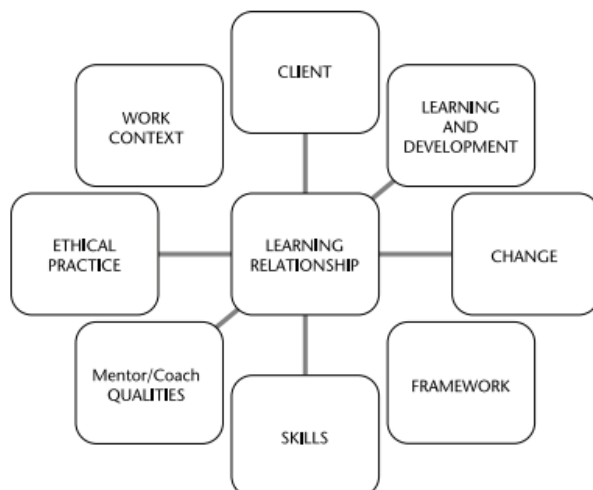
2. THE KEY FACTORS OF EFFECTIVE COACHING

As shown previously, coaching represents usually, a two party's relationship: coach and client. Each of the two holds part of the responsibility for the effectiveness of the coaching process. Also, there is a plenitude of factors regarding each of the two.

Fielden (2005, p.3) states that focusing on improving performance and the development of skills is the key to an effective coaching relationship. She also says: "Effective coaching requires both the coach and the person coached to fulfil their relative roles. The degree to which this is achieved depends on a number of variables, including the experience of both parties in coaching relationships, their interpersonal skills, motivation and commitment." (Fielden, 2005, p.5).

Connor and Pokora (2007, p.6) present the concept that effective coaching is underpinned by nine principles, also summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The nine principles of effective coaching



Source: Connor and Pokora, 2007, p.7

The nine principles are:

1. *The learning relationship is at the heart of change*: this means that learning and change occur through the relationship with the coach. The coach and the client engage and relate and if the coaching is efficient they *connect*. "In a learning dialogue there is, on both sides, a willingness to share perspectives, to listen, to understand, to be open to new ideas and to take joint responsibility for the conversation and the outcomes."
2. *The context is work*: "Short and long term issues are often interrelated" An efficient coach will understand the complex and whole person of the client, and will know enough about the client's work context to be able to facilitate exploration of issues.
3. *The client sets the agenda and is resourceful*: Because coaching is about the client he sets the agenda of the process. This, for some clients, may be easy, empowering or for others rather difficult, and is basically about what the client wants. This represents one of the first steps of the coaching process and may be rather straightforward and demanding. The next step, once the agenda is set, is helping the client identify his internal or external resources needed for the desired change and development.
4. *The coach facilitates learning and development*: The coach is a facilitator and he supports the client to learn and develop. "The client learns by acquiring new awareness, insight, skills, ideas and knowledge. Development involves integrating their learning into the way they are." The efficient coach will ask good questions that provoke new perspectives and change in the client. Also an efficient coaching should be the catalyst for learning and action between the coaching sessions not a substitute.
5. *The outcome is change*: The coaching process is about change, and change provokes resistance that is a normal reaction. "Effective coaches work with client resistance, rather than try to overcome it." Resistance is used in helping the client clarify his values and goals.
6. *The framework for the change process provides movement and direction*: The framework provides a map for the coaching process and offers reference points and a sense of direction. This should be used only when helping the client or rather set aside than constraining the client development.
7. *The skills develop insight, release potential and deliver results*: Connor and Pokora state that an effective coach knows how to use the skills in an integrated way within the learning relationship and has a repertoire of tools and techniques to offer appropriately to the client in order to support their learning and development.
8. *The qualities of the coach affirm, enable and sustain the client*: The coach models a way of being which is both human and professional and offers the client the possibility to learn through them. The client that experiences affirmation and positive challenge from a coach is likely to value themselves more, and therefore value others that impacts on his personal and professional life.
9. *Ethical practice safeguards and enhances coaching*: An effective coach will work within ethical codes. This fact will give the client a safeguard, feeling secure.

For an efficient coaching, the relationship between the two parties is crucial. This concept was also stated by Gregory and Leavy (2012) that point out two key elements of an efficient coaching program: the feedback and the relationship between the coach and the client. These items are crucial for a returning customer and also for obtaining best recommendations. If a client feels safe in the coaching relationship then he will be open to do the work and so, to obtain rapid results in an efficient coaching program.

The relationship is created by promoting indirectly the assets that create an efficient coach: active listening, empathy, communication, the authenticity, the here and now, future oriented, action oriented, the ability to ask provocative questions at the right time, are nonjudgmental etc..(Zeus P and Skiffington S. 2008, K-Burr B. 2011)

Zeus and Skiffington (2008, p. 36) present the coach profile for success. They mention that the coach should be able to know himself, to have the capacity to inspire others, to be able to build relationships, has the ability to be flexible and has the ability to communicate, future oriented, disciplined, has the ability to respect the work boundaries, has the ability to diagnose problems and find solutions, and has an entrepreneurial profile.

Connor and Pokora (2007, p. 20) point out that the term "competence" refers to the ability to perform to a recognized standard, and it implies successful performance against specific criteria. Also, this is

not enough, and it points out the need to focus on capability and capacity, as the ability to adapt to change, generate new knowledge and continuously improve performance, as stated by Fraser and Greenhalgh (2001). The professional bodies concerned with coaching have developed competence frameworks. For a coach, joining a professional body represents owing to that particular competence framework, and the ethical declaration of that particular professional body. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) has outlined four groups of core competencies: setting the foundation; co-creating the relationship; communicating effectively; facilitating learning and results. The European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) points out eight areas of competence: process, domain-specific knowledge, expertise and focus, professionalism and building a practice, values and approach, communication, facilitating and self.

Besides owning a set of assets that create the efficient coach profile and besides following a specific coaching training, the coach is required to constantly analyze his coaching for further efficiency. This is done through coaching supervision. The CIPD (2006) research study regarding coaching supervision has shown that 86% of the coaches partaking in the study have answered that coaches should have coaching supervision, while only 44% actually do it. It also showed that coaches, members of a coaching professional body, are more likely to have coaching supervision. Coaching supervision was defined by Hawkings and Smith (2006) as the process by which a coach with the help of a supervisor, can attend to understanding better both the client system and themselves as part of the client-coach system, and by so doing, transform their work and develop their craft. Hawkings and Sweng (2006, pp.2), suggest another, more complete definition of the supervision process as a “structured formal process for coaches, with the help of a coaching supervisor, to attend to improving the quality of their coaching, grow their coaching capacity and support themselves and their practice.” Hawkings and Smith (2006) also present the three main functions of effective coaching supervision as qualitative, developmental and resourcing.

As the coaching refers usually to a two participant's relationship, the client also holds a big part for the efficacy of the coaching programmer. The client is needed to actively partake in the process, and is needed to understand that the coaching process extends beyond the limits of the coaching session, and he is responsible to do the work in between.

Connor and Pokora (2007) and Zeus and Skifington (2008) point out several items the client should consider before opting for coaching. First the client has to understand that coaching is the service he needs. He has to document himself about different types of knowledge services and decide that coaching is the one he needs. He has to determine the coach he is going to use, and for this is best the client to know a little bit about himself. He has to determine what his personality preferences are for a coach to best create an efficient relationship. The client has to have realistic expectations, and to understand that the process will not *fix* it's problem, but will help him become unstuck, and will help him release his own potential to achieve the desired result. The coaching will be efficient only if the relationship between the two parties will be a balanced one, each taking responsibility for its part. An efficient coaching client will be proactive, preparing for the coaching sessions, and reflecting on previous sessions and gradually will become his own coach through learning the skills and frameworks that have worked for him in the coaching sessions.

A key factor in establishing an efficient coaching relationship is represented by the coaching agreement. The client should consider a series of factors before approaching a coach. Connor and Pokora (2007, p.61) suggest a list of aspects to consider:

1. “Working relationship”
 - What outcomes do you want?
 - Expectations of sessions and work between sessions?
 - Preferred ways of working together?
 - What do you want and need in terms of respect, trust, empathy?
 - What do you want and need in order to learn change, release potential and deliver results?
2. Practical
 - Introductory session to decide if you can both work well together.
 - Location – where would you meet?
 - Frequency – how often would you like to meet? Number of sessions?
 - Length of session – ideal for you, and realistic.
 - Payment procedures- pay yourself or payment by your sponsor/organization?

3. Professional
 - Qualifications of the coach or mentor?
 - Experience and reputation of the coach or mentor?
 - Responsibilities: legal, to the sponsor, to your profession or organization?
 - Supervision, support, continuing professional development of coach or mentor?
 - Recording and note-taking. Who takes? Who keeps? When destroyed?
4. Ethical
 - Negotiated, and signed, working agreement?
 - Built-in ongoing review?
 - Confidentiality – extent and limits?
 - Clear role boundaries?
 - Possible conflicts of interest?"

3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the efficiency of a coaching program is determined by aspects regarding the coach such as his competencies, capabilities and capacities, is determined by the client and his openness to do the work and his proactive approach, and also by the relationship between the two participants. There are different aspects that determine the depths of coaching programs and the personality traits of the coach. The affiliation of the coach to a professional body ensures the existence of needed capacities and also the respect of ethical issues according to the professional body agreement. So, when an organization should consider accessing coaching services it is important to consider the agreement factors mentioned above. Also, it is important to transparently create the relationship between coach and client. To let the client know what are the main reasons for suggesting coaching and what are the desired results, in order for it to consider his own values and desires regarding the final result. When a sponsor is involved in the coaching relationship this should be part in the introductory meeting and he has to understand that he owns a critical position about setting the framework for future coaching relationship. Transparency and fairness are absolutely necessary to create the trust between coach and client for future efficient coaching sessions.

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