



Coaching and Mentoring - A Strategy for Success

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Many organisations are placing increasing emphasis on personal attributes in selecting and developing staff. This can bring a number of benefits, primarily where the development of a motivated, cohesive team is required, for instance in high pressure Call Centre environments, or where the company recognises that its success depends largely on their corporate culture. However, it does not come without significant challenges, not least of which may be significant gaps in the core skills or knowledge required to perform the job. Whilst a formal training course may offer wholesale transfer of many of these skills, it is unlikely that the employee will 'hit the ground running' without further guidance.

Coaching and mentoring schemes are recognised as a highly effective way to quickly ramp up an employee's performance. The IPD 'Training & Development in Britain 1999' survey of 800 Training Managers suggests that around 87% of businesses in the UK utilise coaching and mentoring.

The character of such schemes will vary widely between organisations but may adhere to the following structures:

- Personal coaching programmes employing external or internal coaches
- 'Traditional' or peer-to-peer mentoring schemes
- Buddy schemes, a form of two-way peer-to-peer mentoring

The best model will depend largely on objectives, which may range from the development and fine tuning of specific job-based skills through to a more holistic approach including career planning or work/life balance. The company's culture also needs consideration: there is little point in introducing an isolated buddying relationship between two individuals if their working environment does not recognise the value of mutual support, perhaps in a highly competitive sales environment where staff are measured only on their individual performance.

Whichever approach is adopted, it is essential that an appropriate relationship and working style is established between the coach/mentor and recipient, particularly in internal schemes where the coach, mentor or buddy role is 'secondary' to the employee's primary function. In this scenario, the employee may be unaware of the responsibilities of the role and the skills they need.

To ensure the success of a programme the organisation should take ownership for:

- Developing the culture, processes and procedures to support such programmes
- Redesigning jobs so that the coaching / mentoring function is integrated into the individual's role and awarded sufficient time and priority
- Undertaking skills assessment of their coaches, mentors and buddies and for providing these individuals with appropriate ongoing training and development



- Ensuring that these staff appreciate the responsibility they are assuming for their colleague's professional development, and that they are suited to this role in terms of attitude, emotional maturity and motivation
- Defining the scope of the relationship and where it fits within a broader development programme. This may include defining boundaries, objectives and key performance indicators as well as offering guidelines for how the programme should be delivered.
- Monitoring, measuring and recording effectiveness at both individual relationship and programme-wide levels, through implementing comprehensive feedback and review procedures.

Many companies employ coaching skills as a means of providing ad hoc one-to-one training but only a small percentage adopt coaching as their core strategy for ongoing staff development. Indeed, for every company that achieves this there are a number whose programmes never made it off the paper or whose success was short-lived and unquantified.

However, by ensuring that coaching programmes are properly designed and implemented, well-monitored and integrated into the corporate learning culture, business in the 21st century can look forward to developing a workforce better able and motivated to meet the ever-increasing demands of working life.