

Guide to Being Coached

What are the benefits of business coaching?

Coaching requires a significant investment of time, energy and money, and should deliver value both for the individual and for the organisation. This guide is designed to help you get the most out of your investment in coaching in a business / organisational setting. While each coaching experience is unique, below are guidelines to achieving effective experience as well as questions to stimulate your thinking.

Business coaching enables you to access more of your abilities, helps you to fulfil your potential, enables you to be more effective personally and in your work, and supports your growth and development. Coaching helps you to better understand the context in which you operate, seeing events and your behaviour from new angles and gaining insight into their meaning. It provides a *safe place* to explore strategies and ideas, supports you in developing and articulating your goals, encourages you to be specific about how to achieve them, and maintains your drive and motivation in putting words into action. Coaching is an opportunity for much-needed reflection in a busy work schedule and for understanding what is *supporting* and *blocking* you: a time to step back and then to move forward with greater awareness and responsibility.

Coaching is built around one-to-one discussions between you and a business coach, who will challenge and question you, listen, and provide feedback. The style of coaching is typically *non-directive*, based on the coach's belief that you can reach the answers yourself, but need time, space and encouragement to recognise them and take action. While endeavouring to open up alternative actions, the coach will resist telling you what to do, unless you specifically invite direct input. This intense interaction will be supported, where appropriate, by a range of other mechanisms and tools to draw on existing information, create greater awareness and provide alternative views, creating a richness of input, observation and challenge.

Is coaching the best approach?

Coaching is helpful when you are working towards specific goals, require a confidential sounding board, seek a challenge to your approach and views that may be difficult to obtain from colleagues, and desire honest observation and feedback. This is often the case for those leading organisations, businesses, large teams or significant projects.

Although coaching may seem right for you, it is worth testing whether you would achieve your goals more effectively through other approaches such as specific skills training (eg presentation or public speaking skills) or mentoring. While mentoring has links with coaching, typically a mentor shares a similar business background or experience, may be in the same organisation, has expert knowledge, offers potential solutions from experience and may be seen as *older and wiser*. By contrast, a coach is seen as an equal with different skills and background, but a deep understanding of business. Mentoring may be characterised as *putting something in* whereas coaching seeks to *draw something out*.

What will be the best approach?

- What are my needs? What are the needs of the business?
- What is driving my interest in seeking support now?
- What, if any, are the specific skills I am seeking to develop or improve? How might I increase these skills?
- What, if any, specific expertise or experience would be valuable? What advice do I require?
- What is the balance of my work and personal issues?
- What other alternatives have I considered (eg skills training, mentoring, counselling)?
- Why is coaching an appropriate solution to meet my needs?
- What are my current personal circumstances and are they appropriate for business coaching (eg free from clinical depression or medical trauma, not involved in major life events such as bereavement or divorce)?

When might coaching be helpful?

The trigger for coaching is often a point of transition in your business life, eg role change, promotion, a new team or project, organisation change, strategic redirection, external business challenges. These transitions create increasing demands and a wider range of issues to manage, often spilling over from work into personal life. Other triggers for coaching may include challenging relationships with colleagues, a sense of frustration within the current role, or feeling *stuck* or underused. Coaching may help you to create forward movement, manage complex demands and achieve a better work / life balance.

In its early use in business settings, coaching was often associated with situations where an individual had received poor performance reviews, was not achieving results in a specific aspect of the role, or was in a performance crisis (sometime called derailment). Now, however, coaching is recognised for providing targeted support for high performing individuals – a way of further developing strengths and helping the person to experience greater job satisfaction and achieve even better results. This positioning of coaching draws on the research in the field of positive psychology that supports the value of building from strengths. Coaching assignments often take this positive approach while also recognising the value of addressing development needs.

What will be the focus of my coaching?

- What is driving my current interest in coaching?
- What are the business needs?
- What specific challenges does my business / team / project face?
- What current strengths do I want to develop further?
- What are my own leadership / management / development needs?
- What are my personal challenges in work and affecting my life overall?
- What transitions am I facing?
- What results am I seeking to achieve? What overall focus will I have for the coaching?

What should a coaching contract cover?

The style, focus and structure of the coaching should be agreed before the coaching begins. As your company is likely to be paying for the coaching, *contracting* is an important process. The coaching contract captures the agreements between you, your organisation and the coach / coaching organisation about the intent and nature of the coaching. In business settings, coaching may involve the line manager, colleagues and HR / development director both in preparation for the coaching and in reviewing the outcomes. The contract should specify these elements.

As well as defining contractual terms and conditions, the contract should also clarify critical requirements around confidentiality. Providing a safe place for open discussion requires confidentiality. However, the organisation may wish to hear important general messages or themes that arise particularly from multiple coaching assignments, and may specify this with the coach. The organisation may also specify extreme conditions under which the coach is *required* to inform the organisation (eg when the client is likely to be a danger to themselves or others, or when the client is contravening explicit company rules).

What should the contract cover? (and see What does a coaching programme include? below)

- What is the intent and nature of the coaching?
- What is the involvement of other organisation personnel in the coaching process?
- What feedback and learning will be provided to the organisation?
- How will personal confidentiality be protected (eg with the organisation and in supervision for the coach)?
- What are the contractual terms and conditions? What are the implications (eg cancellation of a session)?

How do I choose a coach?

Selection of the coach is an important step as the relationship between coach and client should encourage openness and honesty. Though expert knowledge is not required for an effective coaching relationship, you may feel more comfortable working with someone familiar with your business, sector or function. Or you may deliberately choose a coach from a different background who is able to challenge your basic assumptions, often a source of illumination.

It is normal practice to arrange an initial meeting with a coach to assess how well you might work together. This is a chance for you to learn more about each other, understand the needs that initiated coaching, and discuss expectations and approaches. Coaches are able to work effectively with most clients, but it is important that you both feel comfortable about proceeding. This meeting is sometimes referred to as a *chemistry* meeting, and it is acceptable at this stage for either party to say a polite 'no' to proceeding.

Is this the right coach for me?

- What are the coach's coaching qualifications, experience, continuing development and supervision arrangements?
- What are the coach's areas of special interest, business background and expertise?
- What are the coach's connections with me or my organisation (eg recommended by someone you trust, on a coaching panel for your organisation, already working with your organisation)?
- What coaching examples / case studies or references is the coach able to share with me?
- How does the coach measure the success of a coaching assignment?
- What are the consequences of choosing this particular coach (eg *chemistry*, budget, conflicts of interest)?

What does a coaching programme include?

Coaching programmes should be tailored to provide maximum value and benefit both to the individual and to the sponsoring organisation. Most will specify a preparation phase (sometimes including elements of performance assessment), a coaching phase (which includes face-to-face meetings and other activities), and a review phase (to test that you have achieved the results you hoped for).

How should I prepare for coaching?

- What are my current / future job and personal challenges? What are the links between them?
- What are my current strengths? What are my areas for development?
- What are my overall goals for the coaching programme? How might I measure success?
- How do these goals relate to those of the organisation?
- How might I involve others, particularly my line manager, in achieving the best results from the coaching?
- What information might be valuable to my coach (eg job responsibilities, performance goals, performance appraisals, 360° feedback, psychometrics / profiles)?

What is the nature of the coaching itself?

- How long will the coaching last?
- How often and for how long will we meet?
- What other activities might be included?
- Where will we hold coaching sessions?

How will the coaching be reviewed?

- How will we close the coaching programme?
- Who else will be involved?
- What information will be shared? With whom? How? (see What should a coaching contract cover? *above*)

What does a typical coaching session involve?

Coaches will structure a coaching session to ensure that you achieve something of value, rather than simply have an interesting conversation. You should expect your coach to ask you questions, challenge your responses, give you feedback, listen deeply, push for clarity on your goals, help you to identify new options and explore which of the alternatives are best, assist in creating a resilient action plan, test your commitment to action and encourage you to complete work between sessions.

What will I think about in a coaching session?

- What is currently bothering me? What do I want to work on? What immediate issues am I facing?
- What challenges and excites me about my current (or potential future) role? What strengths could I use more? Where could I make a stronger contribution?
- What am I ready to address? What do I still need to contemplate further?
- What do I want to achieve in this session? How does this relate to my overall goals?
- At the end of the session, how will I know that it has been worthwhile?
- What is actually happening around this issue?
- How does my behaviour in this area reflect a pattern of behaviour in other contexts? Where has this behaviour been relevant and significant in my life?
- What solutions / approaches have I already considered? What else might I consider? What are the best ideas?
- Who or what in my work and personal contexts could support me in achieving the change I want? What could prevent me?
- What would I be prepared to give up in order to pursue my desired goals? What do I wish to retain?
- What will I put into action? How committed am I to doing this? What will I do next?

Coaching with The Alliance

The Alliance offers coaching programmes with qualified business coaches¹ which are tailored to meet specific needs and provide maximum value. For individual coaching assignments, these programmes typically include:

- Preparation activities eg review of information from the organisation, 360° data, interviews, observation
- A series of one-to-one coaching sessions (often six of about two hours each), held regularly (often monthly)
- Other activities as required eg telephone support between sessions, three-way meetings with the client and line manager, live-action coaching (within a real business situation), psychometric profiling and feedback (eg MBTI®, FIRO-B®, Realise2)
- Review of coaching results against agreed goals.

The Alliance also undertakes coaching-led assignments with leadership, business and project teams to achieve improved performance with stronger trust and mutual support. These assignments may include team-based and individual components.

¹ All Alliance coaches are graduates of The Business Coach™ programme from Meyler Campbell, accredited by the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, and the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

This guide has been produced by The Alliance, a group of experienced coaches. Additional guides, support materials and case studies are available on our website. For further information contact info@alliancecoaching.co.uk or call 020 7794 5841 (www.alliancecoaching.co.uk).