

What is Management Coaching?

Look at your favourite sports team. What is it you see the coach doing? Is the coach playing the game? No. The coach works in the background, helping to develop games skills, to work through emotional issues and to provide guidance as players work through problems.

There is little difference between a sports coach and a management coach. They both seek to help people maximise their potential and their performance. Management coaches achieve this by helping you to obtain feedback on performance and behaviour, establishing goals that will result in a change of behaviour, working through action plans, asking questions, challenging your assumptions, helping you sort truth from fiction and helping you develop strategies for specific issues. A management coach may provide advice if asked however that is not their primary role. The primary role is to guide you in a positive manner.

All coaching is goal oriented. The end game is to change behaviour. If there is no goal involved it is not coaching. It may be referred to as mentoring. The management coach seeks to develop good leadership and management competencies, the ability to facilitate conversations and the ability to work with others in a collaborative manner.

Does a management coach need to have experience in your industry? The short answer is no. While knowledge of your sector helps with understanding of influencing factors, a management coach requires an understanding of the principals of adult learning, the ability to listen, to ask questions in an enquiring manner, be empathetic yet able to avoid becoming a part of your issue and be sensitive to emotional and cultural issues.

Do management coaches need to be qualified in psychology or therapeutic interventions? Again the answer is no. There are grey areas where counselling and coaching may cross paths. Many psychologists offer do offer coaching as a service. When that does occur you may get the best of all worlds. Those coaches without training in psychology require a well developed sense of when they may be crossing into uncharted waters and an understanding of when it is appropriate to suggest or seek help from qualified professionals. Anyone working with another in any form of coaching relationship needs the ability to navigate emotional trigger points as any successful coaching intervention is essentially an open and transparent conversation, which may, on occasions cause some form of emotional response. All coaches who are not qualified psychologists or therapists should be able to demonstrate their framework for guiding you to additional help if required.

Does management coaching rely upon any specific management theory? No it does not, coaching is an application founded upon a variety of learning and development theories and practices. Coaching is not dominated by any specific theory. Management coaches should be able to demonstrate an understanding of management theory, in particular models of change. Management coaches are not there to tell you how to behave – that is something management consultants are retained for – coaches are there to ask questions, to guide you along your own journey of self discovery, towards a goal that you have set, taking actions that you want to take. It is likely that any management coach worth paying for does have a good understanding of management theory and practices; it is likely they have some management experience and it is likely they engage in continuous learning about organisational leadership and management. This may the one area of understanding a specialist management coach has that someone such as a psychologist or therapist may not have developed.

What should you look for in a management coach? Firstly look for experience, not only as a coach, but also experience in leadership, management, an understanding of organisational structure, culture and familiarity with workplace diversity. Secondly look for structure in their coaching process. An experienced coach will be able to demonstrate the frameworks and models they work within and their relevance. Thirdly, and this requires some form of meeting or discussion, look for synergy between you and the coach. This is not to suggest you look for someone that will always agree with your perspective. You are seeking to sense if you feel you can trust the person. Do you feel comfortable with that person? Do you feel you can work together in a collaborative manner? Do you feel dominated or uncomfortable? Does the coach question and probe in a sensitive manner?

Is there any difference between face to face coaching, telephone coaching or online coaching? In the authors experience all three processes can be effective. It is not the medium that matters rather it is the skill of the coach and the willingness of the person being coached to be open and transparent and to do the things they say they are going to do. Each coach, and many clients, will have their personal preferences. The author of this article retains a business coach in another state. They have never met. All coaching takes place by telephone with support via email or Skype. Coaching by telephone or online can sometimes take a little longer due to having to work within the constraints of technology, yet it may be more convenient for the person being coached and may enable a more spontaneous approach to the coaching process.

What sort of fee do management coaches charge? There are as many variations on this theme as there are management coaches. There is no fee standard. The service is highly customised and fees should be considered in relation to the value received. The author has worked with colleagues that charge as little as \$100 per hour and others that charge several thousands of dollars per month for CEO's to access to a coach 24/7. You should always seek a proposal from any potential coach. That proposal should answer any questions you may have about the coaching process, the coach's experience and background, frameworks and models and, of course, the fee. The majority of coaches will have an hourly rate though they will likely quote a contract fee for the project if there is a set number of coaching sessions over a set period. Whatever the fee quoted, always ask, what am I going to get for my money? Several hundred dollars an hour may appear excessive when viewed from a cost perspective only. On the other hand, if ten hours of coaching time is going to help you move into an executive leadership role, with salary in excess of \$100,000 pa, the investment in coaching may very well look cheap in comparison.

Finally, while asking for references is advisable, after all you wouldn't hire a new employee without seeking references, the most important indicator of a potentially good coaching relationship is the 'connection' between you and the coach. How did you feel after you first talked with them? If you feel uncomfortable in any way it is best to continue looking.

The writer of this management, John Coxon, has been working with and coaching individual managers and management teams in the health sector, aged care sector and not for profit sector since 2002.

This management tip has been brought to you compliments of John Coxon & Associates. We have developed an Integrated Management Process (IMP), including a suite of diagnostic tools, designed to help you develop the potential of your management group and align their effectiveness with your mission, strategy and outcome. We work with management teams and managers in the health sector and not for profit sector in Australia and New Zealand. Telephone Australia (03)5561 2228 or NZ (0272) 583232. Email john@johncoxon.com.au or go to our website at www.johncoxon.com.au or www.johncoxon.co.nz. Please feel free to pass this information onto anyone you feel may benefit.