

INSIGHT GUIDE # 1

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

What can coaching do for you?

Coaching has become one of the fastest-growing organisational interventions of the past 20 years. Back in 2000 an internet search for the word 'coach' might have brought you a few thousand responses, most of these connected to coaching in sport. The term has now become a key part of most organisations' learning and development (L&D) strategies. Virtually

every organisation is using coaching; they may be training their managers in coaching skills or hiring external coaches to work with senior managers. But what's the evidence that coaching really contributes to individual or organisational performance? How can organisations get more serious about how they use coaching to enhance performance?



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What is coaching?

Coaching is a development technique which can be used in a wide variety of ways, but is most commonly used to enhance performance – either at work or for a specific task, such as learning to drive. John Whitmore, the originator of the GROW model, suggested that coaching was about encouraging an individual to take more personal responsibility and also to become more self-aware. By making these changes the person could become more choiceful in their decisions.

These ingredients, while helpful, may not precisely clarify the exact nature of coaching. To help, we have included some popular definitions in Box 1.

Mentoring versus coaching

Mentoring and coaching can be often confused, as both are typically one-to-one conversations and involve learning. While coaching tends to focus on a short-term relationship between equals, mentoring is more typically a longer-term relationship in which one of the parties has superior knowledge, which they are sharing with the other individual through the relationship. In terms of process, while coaching is almost always about asking great questions, mentoring can often involve providing helpful answers.

In practice, many coaches, and mentors, work along the 'coaching-mentoring continuum'. They may be both drawing on their skills in coaching while also providing some mentoring for some individuals. If we are attracted to step into the mentoring role, it is important to ensure we have contracted with our coachees that this is what they want and that we do so only at the coachee's invitation during the session.

Box 1: Popular definitions of coaching

Practical definition

Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

Whitmore (1992)

Practitioner's definition (International Coach Federation (ICF))

ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

Academic definition

...a Socratic based future focused dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (coachee/client), where the facilitator uses open questions, active listening, summaries and reflections which are aimed at stimulating the self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant.

Passmore & Fillery-Travis (2011)





Does coaching work?

A decade ago it was hard to provide categorical evidence that coaching worked. Many coaches had seen positive results from their work and coachees were very positive about their experience, but warm feelings are not evidence. Over the past decade a growing number of research studies have provided the evidence that coaching works (Jones et al, 2016; Bozer & Jones, 2018).

This evidence from a wide range of studies has confirmed that coaching is a highly effective intervention that can be useful for a range of common workplace challenges, including:

- transition to a new role
- knowledge transfer from classroom to work role
- workplace stress
- career choice
- assessment preparation
- strategic decision making/reflection
- goal setting

However, coaching is not a magic bullet. The outcomes of coaching conversations are dependent on a range of factors: the skill of the coach, the willingness of the coachee to engage, the quality of the coach-coachee relationship, the suitability of the topic being discussed and the organisational or cultural context in which the coaching is occurring. In short, coaching is a social process and the outcomes are moderated by a multitude of external factors. There are many occasions when alternative interventions would be better; such as when the individual needs to learn a technical skill, when training would be a better option; when the person is seeking to develop their career within an organisation or a sector, when mentoring may be a better choice; or when a manager wishes to address underperformance, when feedback and performance management may be required.

How to find a coach?

Many of the professional bodies have registers of coaches. If you are looking for a coach who has achieved one of the UK's leading coaching qualifications, the Henley Coaching Centre register may be an excellent place to start your search for a coach.

What training do you need to become a coach?

We believe that coach training involves three parts. First, it involves developing a deeper self-awareness. Only when we understand ourselves can we help others in their own journeys of self-discovery. To achieve greater self-knowledge, we encourage our coaching students to reflect: to reflect on themselves, reflect on the situation, reflect on their relationship with their coachee and reflect on their coachee. We do this through the use of the 'Henley Eight'. This unique set of questions is designed to help coaches deepen their self-awareness. Second, we believe that coaches need to develop a wide understanding of alternative approaches alongside the tools and techniques associated with these frameworks. In this way, coaches can develop the skills to adapt and flex their approach to meet the coachee where they are and their specific issue. It has been said that 'when the only tool we have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail'. Third, we believe that coaches should be able to draw together their eclectic mix of approaches to build their own integrated approach, which they are able to both describe and deploy in service of their coachees.

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Henley Centre for Coaching

The Henley Centre for Coaching is a global leader in coaching research and coach training. We are the only triple-accredited coaching provider in the world offering both postgraduate university qualifications in coaching and accreditation from the Association for Coaching (AC), the International Coach Federation (ICF) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC).

The Centre provides formal accredited coach training through our *Professional Certificate in Coaching* and *MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change*, and accredited supervision training through our *Professional Certificate in Supervision*. These programmes are delivered in the UK at our Greenlands campus, and at venues across the world.

The Centre provides continuous professional development for coaching professionals through masterclasses, webinars, conferences, and via online access to journals, ebooks and coaching research. These are all delivered through our online learning platform, meaning coaches can connect from anywhere in the world to engage in professional development.

The Henley coaching team consists of leading practitioners and academics who have shaped the coaching profession since the late 1990s. They have written many of the most popular coaching books and they continue to publish in leading management journals and to contribute at conferences worldwide. Their writing, thinking and research informs our teaching and ensures our programmes are at the cutting edge of coaching practice.

The Centre offers annual membership to all professional coaches, providing a virtual-learning environment where the members shape research and practice in coaching. Check out our website for details on how we can help you and your business come to life.



Jonathan Passmore

Jonathan is a tutor on the Henley coaching programmes, and the author of over 100 scientific papers and 30 books on coaching, leadership and change.

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