

## Mistakes organisations make when implementing a coaching culture

by Dr Mariam Sha

During 2012 coaching was positioned as an enabler of leadership development at The Famous Chocolates Pty Ltd manufacturing plant in order to support the organisation's vision of creating a high performing organisation by having a coaching culture. A coaching framework was then designed and implemented. We were invited to evaluate the programme and provide recommendations for improvement to the roll-out plan

The structure of the coaching framework was to train managers in coaching, managers were then expected to coach their team members and complete a portfolio of evidence. Once accredited these managers would continue coaching their direct reports and other teams as required. The only measurable objective of the programme was to accredit managers as coaches, although implicit in that was to create a coaching culture.

A total of 30 external coaches and 20 internal coaches were selected for the development of both Executive and Managerial staff. More than 2000 business managers and HR professionals attended the coaching programme in 2012, which aimed to reach a further 3 000 managers by the end of 2013. The coaching workshops, a part of the coaching programme, aimed to provide all managers and HR professionals across the plant with basic coaching capabilities as a requirement of their leadership roles.

The Coach training was a two-day workshop, followed by a dialogue session. The practice of this learning was in coaching three direct reports per manager over an average of a six-week period. The managers were accredited by the external coach through observation and on the submission of a portfolio of evidence. All the participants were duly accredited.

Part of our evidence gathering was to interview a sample of individuals who had participated in the programme. The initial reaction to the programme was positive; the programme was clearly introduced throughout the plant, and all those who participated in the programme confirmed that the project was driven by Top management as the main sponsors. "We knew the importance and strategic drive of the programme, Top Management was visible in this regard".

Managers enjoyed the training sessions and agreed that it was relevant to the initial business objective, as it highlighted the competencies needed to be a coach and provided a formalised model for coaching. The information shared was new to many managers on the programme and therefore new learnings. However feedback from managers and individuals in the organisation was once accreditation was completed there was no continuation of coaching – it was seen as a once-off exercise in most cases.

A few managers were upset that it was expected of all managers selected to attend irrespective of their personal views on the programme or their interest in being a coach, others felt that time constraints prevented them from continuing coaching their direct reports.

When asked how coaching was experienced, both Individuals and managers described some of the coaching sessions as skills transfer, where the coach trained the coachee in a skill. While some used it as a therapy session, crying their hearts out about personal issues, others saw it as an opportunity to inform managers about the problems they faced at work, and expected managers to formulate solutions.

A positive outcome of the programme was the skills gained by managers, who were now equipped with tools to coach their teams toward improving performance. For a number of managers who had always coached their direct report prior to receiving the training, although not formally, the training had put a name to the practice and had formalised the process. The skills and knowledge acquired were mainly on questioning, listening and probing techniques. As a result, coachees acknowledged a change in the attitudes of their managers, who had become more approachable.

Other benefits of the programme were sharing of information and knowledge, the encouragement of self-leadership development, a positive change to power dynamics between direct report and managers, and the freedom of individuals to discuss challenges as well as evaluate actions.

In the corridors of the organisation, coaching was unwelcomed. “If you are called in for a coaching session, you must know your time in the organisation is limited”. Coaching was used on people who were underperforming, resulting in the perception that one should be concerned if instructed to attend a coaching session.

Managers and coachees felt the organisation did not consider its current culture and climate before embarking on the programme. “Top management did not take a holistic systems approach to creating a coaching culture and did not consider the obstacles that would prevent

the change. Coaching was previously positioned in the organisation as corrective rather than preventative or performance-enhancing, breeding negative perceptions of coaching as a whole.

Many anomalies in determining an accurate ROI, The organisation had not set clear measurable objectives prior to the programme, the coaching programme had not been applied consistently within the organisation, the culture that existed was not considered when introducing the new changes.

## **Summary: Mistakes organisation make when implementing a coaching culture**

### **1. Ignoring the bigger picture**

An individual does not work in isolation; behaviour is impacted by groups and peers and, in an organisation, cultural norms prevail that can either enable or prevent an individual from implementing change in a positive way. In offering coaching to an individual, an organisation should adopt a holistic approach; individuals being coached cannot change their behaviour if the system does not allow and welcome the change.

### **2. Setting clear measurable objectives**

Neglecting to set individual, team and organisational goals for coaching prior to commencing with a coaching programme leaves little room for specific measurable business objectives, which means coaches and coachees are not working toward specific outcomes.

### **3. Participation is voluntary**

Not every manager has the competencies or perhaps even the desire to be a coach. Coaching is considered a useful skill for all managers to acquire, but in deciding to implement coaching, many organisations do not account for those managers who may lack the will or ability to implement it. Workplace coaches should be carefully selected – the sponsor or HR must be totally clear and in agreement on what competencies and behaviours a coach must possess, taking into consideration how these will be acquired and applied to ensure success.

### **4. Continuation of coaching after training**

Training maybe a set towards accreditation as a coach. Ongoing supervision and monitoring to ensure successful implementation of the coaching programme.

## **5. Failing to monitor and communicate outcomes**

The coach may fail to follow through on monitoring and homework – a vital step in the coaching process; as much as it is necessary to set goals at the outset of a coaching programme, it is also equally as necessary to establish a monitoring process. It is also important to review goals and development during each session; many individuals can be quite dismissive of so-called ‘soft skills’, and in order to overcome this, the coach must clearly communicate the outcome of coaching to job performance.

## **6. Coaches have all the answers**

The explanations and expectations of coaching should be discussed upfront with all stakeholders, and it should be understood that the coach does not have all the answers, but will rather provide the questions. If/when a coach responds to pressure from the coachee or the organisation to achieve ‘quick’ results, the outcome is likely to be superficial rather than a sustained behavioural change.

## **Light bulb moment**

Coaching is a positive tool for high-performers and under-performers alike.

A coaching culture liberates and empowers people to think, it creates innovative organisation.

## **Action Steps**

Your first steps to creating a coaching culture: -

1. Creating a Coaching culture to be a strategic imperative
2. All stakeholder to be included in developing the strategy for a coaching culture
3. Address the current culture enablers and disabler to a coaching culture
4. Set objectives prior to the implementation of the coaching programme
5. Select coaches on defined competencies
6. Clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations of all involved
7. Provide ongoing supervision and support to the coach and coachee
8. Measure return on investment on the programme
9. Review, evaluate and improve to ensure sustainability to the culture of the organisation