

coaching – business essential or management fad?

The global market for executive coaching has grown rapidly, with estimated spending in 2012 in excess of \$2bn, and over 40,000 practising coaches.

However, our recent research report *Coaching – Business Essential or Management Fad?* concluded there is little scientific evidence that coaching actually works, with no large scale trials measuring the impact of coaching on business outcomes.

To avoid coaching becoming just the latest in a long line of management fads, blindly embraced by the business world, we identified a four-stage process that should be applied to obtain maximum benefit from coaching for both the organisation and the executive.

Establish the business case

Organisations tend to overlook the business need that coaching is intended to address and instead place too much emphasis on the

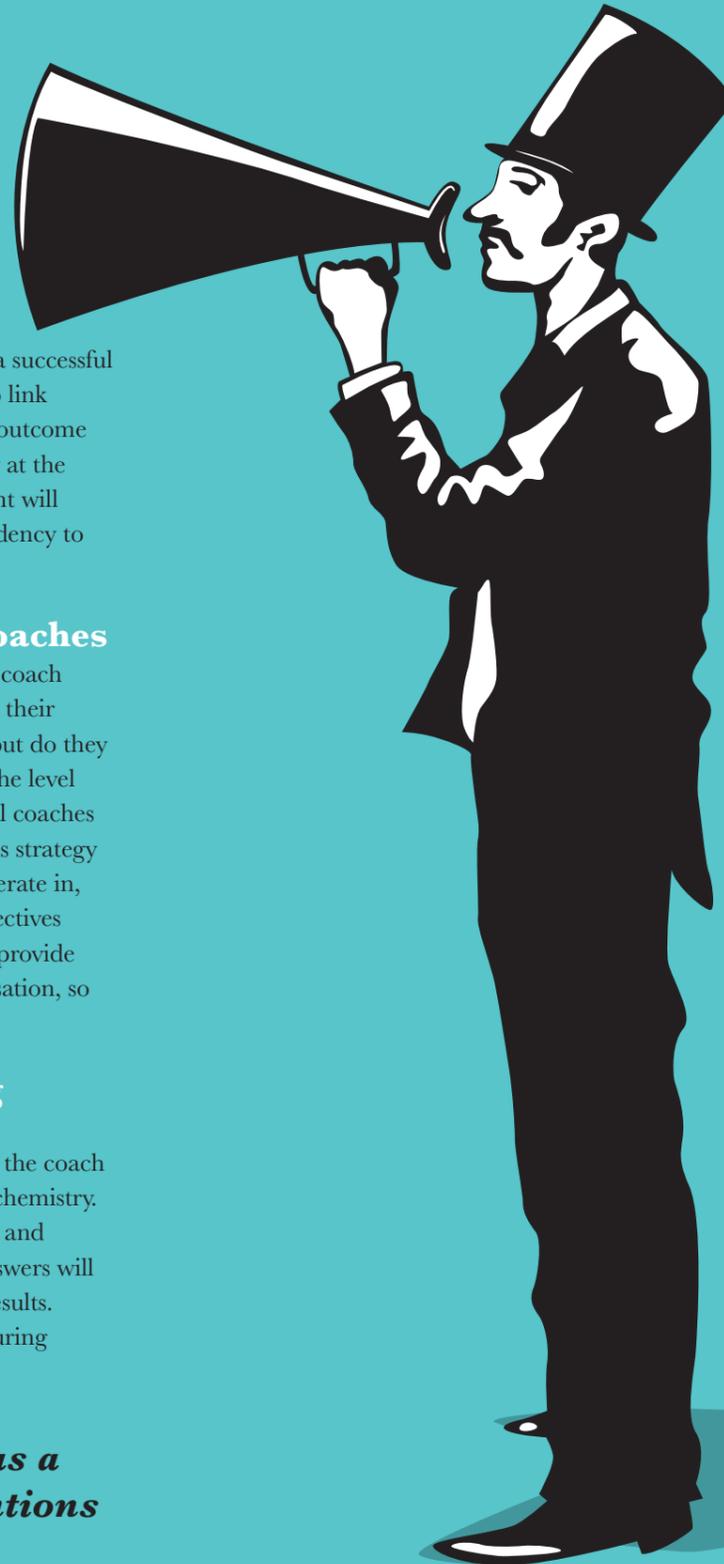
individual engagement. To ensure a successful coaching assignment, it is critical to link coaching with the desired business outcome and develop SMART goals. Clarity at the beginning as to how the engagement will be evaluated will also avoid the tendency to retro-fit results at the end.

Select and manage coaches

Just because someone is a qualified coach doesn't mean they are good. Check their track record – not just as a coach, but do they have experience and credibility at the level you want them to work at? External coaches should also be aware of the business strategy and environment the executives operate in, and the specific challenges and objectives of the executive. Coaches can also provide a unique perspective on the organisation, so don't forget to debrief them.

Manage the coaching assignment

Involving the executive in choosing the coach ensures there is a good match and chemistry. Push the coach to be clear on goals and expectations – unclear or vague answers will ultimately result in disappointing results. Ensure regular feedback sessions during



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the engagement. Make sure engagements don't drag on, with the executive becoming too dependent on the coach. Finally, think carefully about how the learning can be practised on-the-job.

Review and evaluation

Less than half our members routinely undertake evaluation of coaching assignments, but evaluation should not be ignored. Set clear objectives at the start, establish a baseline of performance and focus on outcomes rather than inputs to ensure the business impact of coaching can be evaluated. Having an independent perspective to avoid the coach, executive and/or HR leader 'marking their own homework' will also result in more robust and reliable evaluation.

Unfortunately, in many organisations this good practice isn't routinely adhered to, with coaching often being used as a substitute for good line management. Too often executives see a coach as a 'badge of honour' with the organisation using coaching as a 'panacea' when all other development interventions have failed. Coaching should never be used as a management 'last resort' but as part of a suite of development activities tailored to the needs of the executive and the aims of the business. This is where it can have most impact.

For coaching to truly become a business essential, evidence needs to be sought and a clear line of sight proven between the use of coaching and business outcomes. Until this happens, the jury must remain out.

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Download an introduction to CRF's report *Coaching: Business Essential or Management Fad?* at crforum.co.uk.

A supporting webinar on coaching can be viewed on the Research page at crforum.co.uk.