

## Five tips for engaging a Great Leadership Coach

*"You get the best effort from others not by lighting a fire underneath them, but by building a fire within" Bob Nelson.*

According to the Institute of Coaching, coaching in work and leadership settings is an invaluable tool for developing people across a wide range of needs. The benefits of coaching include; 80% of people reporting increased self-confidence, and over 70% benefiting from improved work performance, relationships, and more effective communication skills.

Harvard Business Review's Pocket Mentor Series builds on these suggestions by including even more business focused outcomes like: overcoming costly business issues (by using the solution focus of coaching), strengthening employee's skills so they can grow at work (and therefore potentially stepping into leadership shoes), improved retention and a reduced cost of training.

However, coaching is currently an unregulated industry so how you can be assured that the Leadership Coach you select is one of the very best?

### **1. Consider the importance of credentials:**

When you consider working with an accountant, therapist or lawyer it's likely that you would want to ensure they are qualified and adhere to strict ethical and professional standards. Coaching should be no different but is currently an unregulated industry so it's vital that you include credentials on your shopping list for a Great Leadership Coach to ensure that you're hiring quality and excellence.

Gaining and maintaining professional credentials comes at considerable cost, so in requesting (and checking) both qualifications and professional memberships you can be

more assured of working with somebody who is absolutely committed to presenting themselves as a serious and dedicated professional.

Hiring purely and simply because you like the coach is like gambling with your employee's wellbeing. Coaching can be personally affronting and challenging, it can require skilfully navigating the delicacies of psychological change and it can generate incredible depth of reflection and self-awareness.

Achieving these outcomes requires more than "just a chat" so ensure that your Great Leadership Coach is both credentialed and a member of a global coaching body.

The main coaching bodies currently committed to developing global training standards include: Association for Coaching, European Mentoring & Coaching Council, International Coach Federation and Association of Coaching.

### **Questions to consider:**

1. How extensive is the coaches training?
2. Have you seen the original certifications?
3. What responsibilities does the coach have for ongoing training and supervision?

### **2. Check you are clear on outcomes:**

Having a strong coaching qualification is half of the story; the other half is making sure that the world your coach has experience of working in aligns to the outcomes you are looking for from the coaching assignment.

Coaches at work are typically asked to work across a variety of areas: more effective leadership methods, better decision-making, improved relationship management, challenging and stretching thinking, better stress management, improved time management, increased confidence, increased self-awareness, creating and achieving career goals, growing resilience...and this list is by no means exhaustive!

Within these contexts a coach can be a safe space to share, a change enabler, a challenger, an impartial observer, a motivator, a pattern interrupter, a listener, a facilitator, an advocate and an educator...again, not an exhaustive list!

One consideration is to have a three-way coaching session at the start of the coaching programme, where the person who is going to be coached, their line manager and the coach meet to discuss desired programme outcomes.

While coaching should always question led, rather than answer led there may be times when you need a coach who has specific knowledge, skills or experience to achieve a specific coaching assignment so getting clear on what you want to achieve from coaching can help to ensure you choose a Great Leadership Coach for the job.

### **Questions to consider:**

1. What would you like the person being coached to do more of by the end of the coaching assignment?
2. What would you like the person being coached to do less of by the end of the coaching assignment?
3. To what extent is the person who is going to be coached aware of these two requirements?

### **3. Use an evidence-based approach:**

It's unlikely that you would offer a job at your workplace without checking the applicant can provide evidence of knowledge, skills and capability in the role; and engaging a Great Leadership Coach should be no different.

Once you've clarified the outcomes for your coaching programme (see Bullet 2), ask the coach for examples of where and how they have delivered similar assignments. Check the problems they had to overcome, how they have learned from their experience and what recommendations they might have for you as you face a similar situation.

If you have strong corporate values, ask the coach to share examples of where they have brought your values to life in their coaching world; a cultural fit check for your coach is just as important as for your employees.

Always keep in mind how confident you would be of the synergy between the Great Leadership Coach that you select and the people you want them to work with (whether their clients will be C-suite, team leaders or team members).

Ask the coach to share at least three referees; people who have worked with them that you can call to talk to about their work. It may be coaching clients (although they may prefer confidentiality) or it may be a business connection who has hired them. Ask the referee questions like: in one sentence, describe the impact this coach made on your business, what are this coaches strengths and shortcomings, would you hire this coach again and is there anything else I should know about this coach before hiring them?

#### **Questions to consider:**

1. What stories can the coach tell you about assignments they've delivered that are similar to your needs?
2. What do the referees say about the work this coach has delivered in the past?
3. What areas of this assignment might your coach not be able to deliver?

#### **4. Understand the process and cost:**

Working with a Great Leadership Coach is not a quick fix solution. Sometimes, there can indeed be great insights and reflections gained from just one meeting but typically, coaching assignments range from three to twelve months, with a 60-90-minute coaching session every four to six weeks during this time.

Where possible, coaching should be face to face, at least at the very start of the process while the relationship builds trust and rapport. For many people, it is possible to enjoy effective coaching conversations via telephone, Skype or Zoom but this is very

dependent on the nature and preferences of both the coach and the person being coached.

Expect to pay between NZ\$250-500+ for coaching sessions. There may also be additional costs relating to psychometric assessments, stakeholder input or behavioural tools, which can add weight and depth to the coaching programme.

It's entirely reasonable to plan for a mid-programme review, taking time to understand how the coaching programme is evolving however this also needs to take into consideration the confidentiality of conversations. One way to achieve this can be for the person being coached to talk through how they are achieving their goals, a conversation that can be facilitated by your Great Leadership Coach if required.

The ultimate goal of a coach is to become superfluous, so your Great Leadership Coach should be ensuring that it's your employee who is in the driving seat, committing to actions and learning in between coaching sessions. If there is a continued requirement for ongoing coaching beyond a year, it could be worth calling into question either the coaching outcomes or the capability of the coach. Perhaps the goals for the coaching programme have not been clearly enough defined or have significantly changed during the coaching assignment, it's possible that the person being coached has become dependent on the coach, or the coach may not be confident enough to challenge the non-achievement of the programme goals...

### **Questions to consider:**

1. Who needs to be included in the discussion about goals – and ongoing updates - for this coaching programme?
2. What reporting would I like from this coaching programme – and how will this be provided within the context of coaching confidentiality?
3. How will we handle any conflicts that arise from the coaching programme?

## **5. Have a clear exit strategy:**

Measuring the ROI on coaching is notoriously difficult because of all the human variables involved and no coaching programme can guarantee results. This is one significant area which is constantly being explored by researchers and academics.

Some ideas to achieve an understanding of the impact include:

- Quantify the coaching outcomes you identified at the start of the programme.
- Look for existing Key Result Areas (e.g. skills and competencies or 360 feedback results) linked to the coaching outcomes and record how they change over time.
- Consider quantitative and qualitative feedback of those being coached, either from in-house surveys or independent auditors.

It's critical to ensure that you have a formal "full stop" at the end of coaching programmes to ensure that they don't drift or morph into another related assignment. If further coaching is required, start over by clearly defining the outcomes required, so that you can be certain that your investment in coaching

Whatever way you choose to assess the success of your Great Leadership Coach, expect to be amazed at the impact on the person being coached, their team and the business overall.

### **Questions to consider:**

- What are the differences that you have noticed about the person being coached? Or their team?
- How have you celebrated the impact of the coaching programme?
- How have you formally gathered feedback about the approach used by your Great Leadership Coach?