

# Oxfam Coaching Update



**ISSUE 12, May 2012**

**Welcome to issue no 12 of Coaching Update, designed to share ideas and experiences around coaching across our organisation.**

In the last update we challenged you to think about how you coach and lead those you coach. In this session we will reflect on the effectiveness of our coaching approach.

## **How do I know if I'm doing a good job?**

From time to time both newer and more experienced coaches will find themselves wondering whether they are adding value. *Am I really making a difference? Have I helped?* How we measure the success of coaching is critical in shaping our response to these questions, and what and how we measure will be influenced by a wide range of expectations about what coaching is supposed to achieve (expectations from ourselves, our organisation, the individual we are coaching, the way we've been trained to coach etc).

### **Ask yourself:**

- What are the main ways I currently evaluate the success of my coaching?  
Why is that?
- Do I tend to focus on the success of specific interventions? On each session?  
The relationship as a whole?
- Where do I place more value – on my own impressions, or on the feedback I get from the coachee?
- What's the impact on the coaching of the way I evaluate?

Below are some common themes which emerge when exploring these questions:

### **1. Not believing coachee feedback**

*'The coachee said they really valued our session, but I didn't feel as though I did anything. I'm not sure if I really did help them or not.'*

Are we in danger of letting our own concerns / egos get in the way? Coaches may have been led to believe that they need to have asked really incisive questions, create a number of 'lightbulb' moments, and generate lots of action points in order for a session to be effective. Whilst all of those things *may* add value, we also need to recognise, based on shared experience, that the coachee can also experience a lot of value when we do and say less. We need to learn to trust the process, focus more on the *quality and trust of the relationship* we are building rather than relying on specific interventions, and remember that we are accompanying another individual on their personal journey, which will have its own unique tempo.

### **Application:**

- Ask the coachee to sum up what's been most useful / significant at the end of the session. This is often a chance for a level of meta-reflection which may in itself generate clearer insights or motivation to act.
- If it feels important to do so, you might also share your own perspectives, and ask for feedback on the approaches you took.
- If needed, agree how you might adjust your approach next time.

## **2. Not understanding the coachee's process**

*'I felt like the coachee was going round in circles. They even apologised for rambling. And they couldn't come up with a clear goal.'*

We will only see this as a problem if we fail to recognise that uncertainty is often the pre-cursor to deeper level insights and learning. In my experience, when coaches examine their own developmental journeys, they find that periods of confusion and self-doubt have been as much a part of their experience as moments of clarity and confidence. So there's a need for us to learn to be at ease with the more challenging facets of change, which might require us to rein in our drivers to help or rescue.

### **Application:**

- If we're genuinely feeling confused about the direction of the coaching conversation, we might ask 'I'm wondering how this is connected to the overall themes we're working on?'
- We need to recognise that sometimes there's a need for coachee to process what's front of mind / immediate challenges (e.g. difficult boss, work-life balance issues, current crisis) before they can really look at longer term goals.
- Different personality types will have differing preferences regarding reflection and action. Learn to adapt your approach to accommodate different styles.
- Ask the coachee to describe what's has moved on / shifted for them, even if it feels like they may still be stuck. Something *always* changes, even if it's a deepening awareness of how stuck they feel! That can be part of the process, and even if it feels frustrating, it can open up a better understanding about what may be creating the blockage.

### 3. Not knowing what's happening behind the scenes / reading the signals

*'We had to postpone our last session and we still haven't got a date for when we might next speak. I've e-mailed a few times, but I haven't heard back. I'm wondering whether they're finding the coaching useful or not.'*

There are lots of reasons why coaching can go off radar. Sometimes these are more or less unavoidable (travel, holiday, diaries, unexpected crisis, sickness, increased workload), and other times we may feel uncertain about the coachee's motivation, commitment, perception of value, chemistry with ourselves etc. This uncertainty can lead us to project fears about our own performance onto the coachee or the relationship.

#### **Application:**

- By all means contact the coachee a couple of times to arrange the next session, but after that leave it to them to take responsibility to communicate.
- Give time to re-contracting / confirmation of agreement next time you have a session if there has been a longish gap. It's likely that circumstances / priorities / focus for the coaching may have changed in the interim, so it's important not to assume that what you originally contracted for is still 100% relevant.
- Make it OK / safe for the coachee to discontinue the coaching if it doesn't feel it's the right time for them. If someone hasn't had coaching before, they may not have fully appreciated what's involved, and what level of commitment is required from them. It's also possible that for whatever reason they might benefit working with someone else. That doesn't mean you've failed.
- Use this as a mutual opportunity to learn from the situation.

#### **Final thoughts**

Research shows it's the quality of the *relationship* as perceived by the coachee which is the most reliable indicator for the value of the coaching. So when we evaluate our performance, we may need to change our questions.

- Am I building an open relationship – where we can talk about what's happening in the coaching and give and receive feedback on how its working with each other?
- Is there a good balance of shared ownership for the coaching – after all, it's a 50:50 relationship. Am I trying to do too much and is that getting in the way? Am I doing too little in terms of preparation and interim communication and is that getting in the way?
- Am I helping to build trust? What might be getting in the way of that and how could that be addressed?
- Is the coaching supporting the coachee to develop awareness and gain new insights? Is there enough space for their own thinking and reflection?
- Is the coaching supporting the coachee to develop responsibility for taking action? Are they moving forward (this will probably be harder to evaluate at the start of the relationship, so it's important to manage your own expectations regarding the coachee's pace of change).

## Resources

### **The Trust Equation**

<http://trustedadvisor.com/why-trust-matters/understanding-trust/understanding-the-trust-equation>

### **The Holy Grail of Executive coaching: Discovering what Really Works**

[http://www.ashridge.org.uk/website/IC.nsf/wFARATT/The%20Holy%20Grail%20of%20Executive%20Coaching:%20discovering%20what%20really%20works/\\$file/TheHolyGrailOfExecutiveCoaching.pdf](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/website/IC.nsf/wFARATT/The%20Holy%20Grail%20of%20Executive%20Coaching:%20discovering%20what%20really%20works/$file/TheHolyGrailOfExecutiveCoaching.pdf)

### **The Case for Coaching: Investing in Leadership**

<http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/Coaching,%20investing%20in%20leadership.pdf>

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