

# Oxfam Coaching Update



## ISSUE 13, August 2012

**Welcome to issue no 13 of Coaching Update, designed to share ideas and experiences around coaching across our organisation.**

In the last update we challenged you to reflect about how to measure the success of coaching. In this session we will think about how we create time to coach at a personal, team and organisational level.

### **Making time to coach**

One of the coach development programmes I teach on invites delegates to rank a number of different coaching values and behaviours – one of which is ‘Makes time for coaching.’ It’s often discarded as a ‘given’ or too obvious! But making time for coaching is a deciding factor for whether we use our skills to make a difference, or not. Use it or lose it!

### **How do we value coaching?**

Perhaps a starting point is to look at how we and others value the contribution that coaching can make, at personal, team and organisational levels. Is it perceived as just a ‘nice to have’ which helps us to feel better about ourselves but doesn’t really impact on the work of the organisation? Or does it have a critical part to play in creating vision and enabling the changes we want to see, supporting better quality thinking and creativity, lowering risk, adding value to our relationships.....?

As coaches, we might have our own view about its value and potential, but how well do our colleagues or those we report to understand the role it can play? What opportunities might there be in sharing successes across the organisation? What impact would gaining buy-in from key stakeholders have on making time to coach? Whether you are an internal or an external coach, you still need to be able to ‘sell’ coaching – which may involve participating in building anecdotal as well as more objective evidence about the impact of coaching, and deepening your own and others understanding of how coaching can address organisational priorities and strategies.

Internal coaching generally happens in a range of formats, from designated lead coaches through to individuals who weave coaching into their management and

leadership style - coaching in the day to day. And wherever you sit on that spectrum you can still ask yourself how you are contributing to a better understanding and valuing of coaching across your organisation. Because if key stakeholders in the organisation don't understand and value coaching, it will be hard to justify making time for it.

## How do we create coaching opportunities?

One of the key challenges I hear from coaching managers is the perceived lack of time to invest in 121 coaching. Closing the door on the unending list of tasks and people to manage in order to offer quality time for even an hour can seem an impossibility! Especially when you are already completely frazzled yourself.

I haven't been able to wave a magic wand and make that reality go away (yet), but I have supported significant changes over time. What's involved is a shift in intention and beliefs about role and purpose – away from a primarily operational and task-oriented mindset, to one which is strategic and developmental. Effective coaching managers and leaders bring much more than the ability to coach individuals, or even teams. They bring a 'coaching intelligence' to the way work is organised and planned - in ways that *build in* rather than simply *bolt on* learning and development opportunities.

### Case Study

'Kieron' is a senior manager at a fast growing IT firm. He joined the organisation straight after graduating from university, when the organisation was still quite small. It's now in a phase of rapid growth and neither he nor his colleague have ever received any management development. The MD wants to bring in a coaching culture – and Kieron and his colleague are booked onto a coach training programme. The reality is, however, outside the 121s they might normally have with team members, they cannot create extra time for individual coaching sessions...

We began by mapping Kieron's key work relationships and his points of contact with each of them, identifying individuals and relationships where a focus on development would be most effective. We looked at how he reframed his role and purpose from one of delivering results through managing the tasks of my team, to one of delivering results and building capacity by developing his team for the future. By re-orienting his identity and purpose as a senior manager, Kieron started to use team meetings far more developmentally - What are we learning? How do we use / share that? How do we organise projects / tasks to create and maximise opportunities for peer to peer learning and development? How do I engage with the career aspirations of my team members and support opportunities for their growth?

Kieron recognised a silo mentality within his organisation, and took his approach across to other teams, creating action learning groups to support joined up thinking as well as exploring broader challenges. He uses 121

coaching at times, but it's part of a wider palette of strategies to support growth and change. The shift in approach was incremental and took a number of months to embed, but resulted in time in him acting far more strategically within the business, and 'coaching the organisation' –the added bonus to him was he developed enough confidence in his team to finally feel OK about not checking his emails whilst on holiday!

## **How do we build time into our diaries and create clarity of purpose?**

Some of the safe-guarding of time relates back to how we and others value coaching in the first place, but we also need to be accountable to our own time management. We might get away with squeezing a coaching session in between two other meetings a couple of times without feeling overly compromised about the quality of attention we can give the coachee. But we all know it's not good practice on a regular basis! Thankfully there are some pretty straightforward and practical steps we can take to ensure time for coaching in the diary.

Do we have a clear sense of how much time (in a week or month) is enough for the coaching we've committed to? Have we factored in time before and after the actual meeting to allow for, note-taking, getting to a meeting room etc? Have we made agreements with the coachee about what needs to happen if a meeting has to be cancelled and how much warning you will aim to give each other? Are there times of day which work better for both of you – early afternoon is generally not a great time for coaching as our bodies are more interested in digestion than in deep listening and powerful questions! And if either or both of you need to dash off at the end of a session to catch a train, plane or get to any other assignation, it will add pressure and can be an unhelpful distraction.

We can also maximise the use of time by encouraging the coachee to think carefully about how he/she wants to use their session so that there is a clarity of focus - sometimes a lack of clarity is OK and even necessary, but on the whole it's good practice for coachees to take ownership for the time being spent well. It's one of the ways in which the coaching can be extended beyond the time constraints of the meeting, i.e. some of the thinking and reflection has already happened in advance.

Another way of extending the coaching is for the coach to know when to stop (!). Sometimes we think can see all the steps that lie between where the coachee is now and where they want to be, and we try and cover more ground in a coaching session than what an individual actually needs or wants. This can potentially *waste* time, as the quality of insight about just one or two particular areas gets lost in too much detail. A better use of time might be to explore what the coachee will do to build on those particular insights or new perspectives so that they are actively engaged in their own journey of development and enquiry between sessions.

## How do we ‘clear the space’ and come into presence

Finally, how do we shift gear and manage our own inner states to allow for that wonderful timeless quality we sometimes enjoy in coaching – where there is nothing else but the now of the present moment. We hear more and more in the coaching profession about the roles that meditation and mindfulness can play in enabling presence - ‘a state of awareness, in the moment, characterised by the felt experience of timelessness, connectedness, and a larger truth’ (Silsbee).

Preparing ourselves for coaching usually involves a down-shifting in our metabolic rate and brain-wave patterns. I’ve yet to encounter an approach to coaching that advocates the coach arrive agitated, out of breath and pre-occupied by their own ‘stuff’! Part of our skills set is the agility to move between different states. When our brains are mainly functioning in beta mode, we are primed for rapid analysis and problem-solving, but at the expense of slowed down thinking, openness to working with imagery and working from our intuition which an alpha wave state enables. Our physiological state shapes the space we create with the coachee, and consequently the quality of thinking that they can engage in.

Each coach needs to find their own practices to enable them to offer this sort of space. Will-power alone (I will be calm! I must be calm!) tends not to work all that well – so whether it’s running, meditation, fishing, playing an instrument – whatever enables you to train your mind to become still and focused, make sure it’s part of your self-care and development as a coach.

And if you’re really stuck – here’s a great exercise that you can practice in the shower, on an aeroplane, riding a bike, waiting for the kettle to boil. Most of us are already pretty good at doing this in front of the television...

### Thinking with our tongues

Did you know we think with our tongues? Try this experiment. Sitting comfortably, let your jaw drop open, and allow your tongue to relax, and then relax some more. Don’t worry about how you look or whether you are starting to drool. Keep relaxing your tongue.

Now think about the list of all the jobs you have to do.

And notice what happened to your tongue when you started to do that thinking. You may have noticed that it tensed a little, or that you felt the back of your tongue raise slightly. That’s called sub-vocalisation – what we do when we are getting ready to speak – and also think.

Now go back to a relaxed tongue state. Notice what feels different, how it affects your breathing. And if you really, really relax your tongue, it can make it hard to ‘think’ in the usual sense at all.

*Adapted from ‘The Awakened Mind’ Anna Wise*

## Resources

Presentation by David Lane, author of 'The case for Coaching'

<http://www.holacoach-espinal.com/aiac/archivos/The%20Case%20for%20Coaching.pdf>

The Anna Wise Centre – information on brainwave and brainwave training

<http://annawise.com/home>

Home page for Doug Silsbee, author of Presence Based Coaching and The Mindful Coach

<http://www.dougsilsbee.com/>

Time to Think website – with information on Nancy Kline's Ten Components of a Thinking Environment®

[http://www.timetothink.com/uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=67&Itemid=88](http://www.timetothink.com/uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=67&Itemid=88)

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