

Coaching within the company

Coaching is an instrument of personnel development utilised in many companies today, where it has established itself as an element of human resources work. Despite this, resentment and resistance is frequently to be encountered amongst the coachees, who view the activity as an unnecessary visit to the psychiatrist's couch. Here it is important to make clear that the goal is not to rectify any deficits as is the case with therapy, but instead to reinforce strengths and utilise these as the situation requires. It is therefore possible to describe the process as a strengths-oriented approach. Naturally, this does not mean that weaknesses are overlooked; they are given the attention that they require in the coaching process and treated accordingly, to ensure that they do not have a negative effect on performance at critical moments.

Coaching is an intensive form of developing own strengths and adapting these to meet changing situations within the company. The setting in a familiar environment makes it possible to address aspects of personalities and their development that would not otherwise be possible in another framework. It is therefore an approach that should be used in particular by management staff at all levels of the company.

How we interpret coaching

Today, the term coaching is frequently used inappropriately to describe any meeting between consultant or trainer and an employee at the workplace. This often involves the communication of skills and abilities. It would surely be more appropriate here to talk of "training on the job". Coaching is less a question of communicating something, more one of reflection, raising awareness and expanding options for action.

Coaching is characterised in particular by the trust inherent in the relationship between coach and coachee. In this sheltered space it is possible to discuss professional issues that would remain unbroached in other circumstances. The objective here is to address those issues that have an effect on performance. This may sometimes also extend into the private realm. However, it should be clearly pointed out that the purpose of coaching in the company is not, for example, to perform the role of a marriage guidance counsellor. In the corporate field it is also possible to talk of performance coaching, the objective of which is to secure sustainable performance on the basis of a healthy personal balance.

One characteristic aspect is frequently the triangular constellation between client = customer, coachee and coach. In this triangular relationship - which may also be referred to as contract coaching - it is in some cases expected and necessary to report findings from the coaching back to the company. Here it is important that the degree of permeability of information is apparent and transparent to all involved. The coach is otherwise obliged to observe the same confidentiality as that of a psychologist.

Coaching: reasons and objectives

A common reason for coaching is personal changes in the professional environment. For example, when an employee departs the circle of colleagues for the position of superior. This requires that former behavioural models are broken up and new ones recognised and practiced. Moreover, it is also necessary to stabilise conflict situations, as well as clarifying the question of adequate proximity and distance. Managing these changes is a goal of coaching.

A second key area in which coaching is required is in the stabilisation of senior staff members in pressure situations that may arise as a result of corporate changes. Here it is important for the employee to regain a balance between performance, purpose, social contacts and, not least, emotional health.

Concepts in coaching

Perhaps the most significant concept is that the objective is not to alter the personality of the client but to reflect upon the behaviour manifested and consciously adapt it to the - altered - situation. The aim of this is to achieve results that benefit the company as a whole. In this respect, each coaching mandate requires the initial agreement of what specifically is to be achieved and how this is ultimately to be seen and measured. Results orientation is to the fore. The fact is that one specific behavioural approach is more practical for achieving results than another. This varies from situation to situation. A participational management style may be highly suitable for one situation but lead to poor results in another. Reflecting this, adapting and implementing it is one objective of coaching. This means that, to a large extent, coaching takes place at behavioural level, as an expression of personality. At the personality level the aim is to demonstrate those personality traits that are necessary for good performance and those that have a hindering effect. Standardised inventories may be incorporated to clarify the nature of personality traits. One example of these is the "performance motivation inventory", which reveals the performance motivation within a personality. Using such findings as a basis, coaching can then support the strengths of the coachee and strategies can be developed for their utilisation.

Beyond this, coaching, viewing the individual as a whole, should also keep an eye on the balance of the coachee. In particular, this regards the balance between the dimensions of

- Profession / performance
- Meaning and visions for the coachee's own life, extending beyond professional life itself
- Health
- Family / social contacts

The balance between these four dimensions is viewed by N. Peseschian as the basis for enduring success and a healthy life.

Setting and approach

The process can be divided into five stages, passed through in the course of the coaching.

The first stage involves getting to know one another, with coach and coachee encountering each other for the first time and determining, in mutual discussion, whether a rapport exists and the joint process should be continued. In this initial conversation the coach hears from the coachee's viewpoint about the problems and corporate circumstances that the coachee has to deal with. In this, a further focus lies in identifying the genesis of the current problem.

The second stage is the diagnosis of the strengths and potential of the coachee. In addition to the structured discussion, inventories may also be employed here to describe the personality structure of the coachee with regard to the tasks within the company.

In the third stage the knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the coachee and the situation of the coachee forms the basis for the mutual agreement and fixing of the specific objectives of the coaching in written form. If the coaching concerned is contract coaching, then the superior should also be involved. This means that the expectations that the superior has of the employee or coachee are integrated into the process and the coaching goals are agreed upon together.

The fourth stage typically comprises five to seven sessions, in which the causes of the problems and possible solutions are drawn up. The interval between the sessions should be approximately three to four weeks. This is a period in which findings can be implemented.

In the fifth stage, following the coaching intervals, in a concluding meeting a summary of the coaching is drawn up with the client and, where necessary, the superior. In this the changes visible in the scope of the coaching are documented and further development measures and steps are agreed upon. Ultimately, coaching within a company is part of a permanent process of development and should not be regarded as an isolated measure.

According to the model presented here, the time period for coaching co-operation comprises approximately nine to 12 months, depending on the frequency of individual sessions.

Summary

Coaching is an intensive form of developing own strengths and adapting these to meet changing situations within the company. The setting in a familiar environment makes it possible to address aspects of personalities and their development that would not otherwise be possible in another framework. It is therefore an approach that should be used in particular by management staff at all levels of the company.