

Strengthen your **mental muscle** through coaching

Life is fast. And complex. The pace of existence is escalating into a frenzied state of almost instant everything. Add to this scenario the complexity inherent in the world of work, as well as the desire to do more, better, with greater insight and more meaning. Sound familiar? **Perhaps you need a coach.**

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The coaching trend

Since its emergence in the 1980s many organisations have incorporated executive coaching as a core component of leadership development programmes. According to Harvard Management Update's article 'What an Executive Coach Can Do for You', under the right circumstances, one-on-one interaction with an objective third party [such as a coach] can provide a focus that other forms of organisational support simply cannot.

In a 2004 survey by Right Management Consultants, 86 percent of companies said they used coaching to sharpen the skills of individuals who have been identified as future organisational leaders.

Debunking the coaching phenomenon

According to business coach, Nicola Slingsby, coaching is an equal status partnership that develops outside the political environment of the workplace. The coach is an objective ally, who challenges the coachee in a non-directive way, where the emphasis is on strategy and process rather than content.

Coaching is not therapy, nor is it a substitute for therapy. While therapy is more oriented in the past, particularly regarding traumatic events, coaching focuses on the future.

"The coaching process facilitates heightened self-awareness which consequently empowers people to make choices. When people see the world more broadly, they have more choice," explains Slingsby. "It broadens the coachee's structure of interpretation – how they view the world. This leads to self-observation, and consequently self-correction and self-generation."

What to expect in a coach



Nicola Slingsby advises potential coachees to consider the following issues:

- What do you want to achieve from coaching? If you are looking for skills transfer, then you require a mentor, not a coach.
- Unless you have an instant connection with the first coach you meet, interview three coaches. Coaching is a very personal journey and there needs to be a fit for both parties.
- What is coach's methodology, how many sessions are involved?
- What does the coach expect of you?
- How does the coach communicate? Is the coach accessible on e-mail or telephone?
- Does the coach have business experience, what levels has the coach worked at and in which industries?

While coaches utilise different processes and tools depending on their training, a coach needs to be neutral, compassionate and intuitive, challenging the client in a manner that does not render the client defensive, centred, observant or detached. Coaches do not give advice, direct or blur the boundaries of the coaching relationship.

But, this is a gradual shift – it does not happen overnight.

The coach as a co-pilot

Coaching can be a valuable tool for entrepreneurs who often do not have an extensive support base, providing a safe space for reflection and discussion with an objective, external partner, Slingsby explains.

Entrepreneur and coach at executive coaching firm Change Partners, Daryl Chirnside, regards coaching as an essential tool for those starting their own businesses. "Marketing and sales are often the biggest stumbling blocks for entrepreneurs," she says. "A coach can facilitate a coachee's understanding of how to maximise resources and use networks."

Adelle Wapnick, entrepreneur and managing director of advertising and communications firm Cross Colours, says she contracted a coach when her business entered a growth phase. "For entrepreneurs it is difficult to know 'when to let go'. Coaching provides an opportunity to review and assess your role," she says. As a mother of two, she also wanted more balance in her life.

"Coaching allowed me to view the business holistically and to explore ways to find that balance," Wapnick explains.

A tool for women in business

Coaching can assist women in business to assess their situation in their work context, and then make the changes they desire, according to business coach Catherine Ciolli. She believes coaching can support women in business by empowering them in their lives.

While men and women face a myriad of challenges in the work environment, the differences lie in the emphasis of these challenges, explains Ciolli. For example, women fulfil many roles in various contexts, including executive, mother and woman. While men have the same roles, the stress regarding role conflict (when you need to be in two places at once) and role overload (when you need to fulfil two roles at the same time) seems to create more tension for women than for men.

When coaching female clients, Chirnside says that very often the client sets coaching goals to achieve an appropriate level of assertiveness and self-confidence. "This requires a delicate balance. Coaching encourages clients to look at every aspect of life in this regard, and to practice these new techniques, because many women in business are either too assertive, or under-assertive."

For women in business, either entrepreneurs or those working in a corporate environment, networking is also an issue. "Women have to overcome their own mental obstacles and perceived awkwardness in approaching males. Coaching can help unpack preconceived notions and explore networking strategies," she says.

It's all about you

Slingsby emphasises that while coaching is a great tool, it is only as good as the coachee's desire to grow and change. "Coaching is a container for transformation and it creates an environment conducive to change. But coachees have to be 100 percent committed because coaching – while it is not a remedial intervention – it is an intensive journey involving top performers who are keen to fine tune their skills even further."

Adelle Wapnick
Managing Director of Cross Colours