

SEVEN TIPS ON SELECTING YOUR BUSINESS COACH

Read on for answers to the following issues:

1. What is business coaching?
2. Why might I need a business coach?
3. Finding a business coach
4. First impressions
5. What questions should I ask?
6. So it's OK so far – then what?
7. How will I measure the value of coaching?

1. What is business coaching?

- 'Business' coaching focuses on your business and your role within it – its objective is to improve overall business performance.
- 'Coaching' describes the way in which you and your coach will work together on issues that are important to you. This is done in a way that helps you to understand the issues, develop solutions and take responsibility for a successful outcome.

INSIDER TIPS!

1. *Make sure that any conversation between you and a coach is **confidential**.*
2. *Be clear about what sort of 'coaching' you want.*
3. *Think about how receptive you are to being challenged to develop your own solutions as opposed to being given somebody else's immediate answers.*

2. Why might I need a business coach?

- Here are some questions you might want to ask yourself:
 - Is my hairdresser the only person who holds up the mirror for me?
 - Am I having difficulty getting away from my business?
 - Can't decide what decision to make?
 - Am I having difficulty sorting out the urgent from the important?
 - Are there three people in my relationship – my business, my spouse/partner and me?
 - Am I – Short of time? Short of breath? Short of energy?
 - Does the same challenge keep coming back?
 - Are my people just not 'getting it'?
 - There must be a better solution out there, somewhere?
 - When do I ever get any time to do some proper thinking?
- You might, then, have some specific and immediate needs, a sense that not all's well or a feeling that there are some things you could be doing better. Your coach will work closely with you at the beginning and throughout the relationship, to ensure that clear goals are set and your time is well spent.

INSIDER TIPS!

- 1. Really check the benefits of coaching with people you know who've been through it.*
- 2. Get them to describe specifically what those benefits were.*
- 3. Talk to both the people you trust and more importantly those who give you a hard time to understand what you could do better.*

3. Finding a business coach

- As with many other things, word of mouth is very powerful. Ask the people you network with whether they have come across any coaches they would recommend. Have they had any coaches recommended to them?
- Local networking groups like the Chamber of Commerce, ecademy, Refer-on and the Institute of Directors are useful face-to-face sources.
- Go on line and Google 'Business Coaches'. You may want to restrict the search geographically – say 'Business Coach Thames Valley'.
- When you search, try to get an idea of what Coaching Qualifications the coach has. Professional coaches will have invested in an accredited coaching qualification. There are a number of top coaching bodies such as the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and the Association for Coaching (AoC).

INSIDER TIPS!

1. There's a saying that you have 'to kiss a lot of frogs to find a prince'. Don't be impatient about finding the right coach for you.

2. Use the 'six whys?' when you talk to people to make sure you fully understand why their coach was successful.

Note: Be aware that this is a provocative questioning technique!

3. Knowing your coach is geographically close means you can share local issues to build empathy e.g. the third runway at Heathrow!

4. First impressions

- The essence of a good coaching relationship is rapport and trust. Rapport – such as shared interests – can happen quite quickly.
- Have an initial face-to-face meeting with your prospective coach to see if the 'chemistry' works – trust your 'gut' feeling.
- Trust takes a little longer but is important if you are to get the most out of the coaching relationship. Ask yourself if you could be totally open and honest with the coach.
- Ask the coach what a typical coaching session would be like – what might you expect of him/her and what might they expect of you?
- Double check that you're talking to a business coach rather than a life coach or therapist.
- This could lead straightaway to the next stage of the coaching process or you could agree to call it a day.
- Don't be reticent about doing this if you really don't feel you and the coach will be able to develop a trusting relationship.
- If you feel you need more time to reflect on this and/or talk to other potential coaches then that's fine.

INSIDER TIPS!

1. Don't feel as if you have to take the first coach you talk to.

2. Recognise that you might benefit from somebody who is not like you – the 'grit in the oyster'.

3. Don't be lulled by an easy going conversation – you need somebody who will challenge you – not agree with everything you say.

5. What questions should I ask?

- Usually there are *four* areas you will want to explore:
 - ➔ What business experience has your coach had? What industries? What level of seniority? Has he/she any experience of working with companies like yours? What issues have you dealt with? Views differ on whether the coach needs to know your industry inside out – you may prefer someone who relies on you to be the subject matter expert.
 - ➔ What qualifications do they have? Education and professional bodies, for example, are important.
 - ➔ As previously mentioned, check out their coaching qualifications – have they been accredited by a recognised coaching body and/or academic establishment?
 - ➔ What coaching experience do they have? Again explore the clients, at which levels and whether one to one or groups or both?

INSIDER TIPS!

1. Don't get hung up on whether the coach knows your industry or not – a good coach will be able to 'right size' their experience to meet your needs.

2. Make sure the coach has a broad view of business performance and is not too technical; e.g. Finance/IT/HR.

3. Don't let technical or education related qualifications outweigh direct operational experience – you need the practice not the theory!

6. So it's OK so far – then what?

- At either the initial meeting – if the chemistry is OK – or subsequently when you've selected your coach – you need to agree how you will work together. The jargon for this is 'contracting'.
- This essentially sets the tone for how you and the coach will work together and has a number of key parts:
 - ➔ What do you want to achieve from the coaching engagement – the goals and objectives.
 - ➔ What are your expectations in terms of the way in which you and the coach will work together? Do you recognise, for example, that the responsibility for what is agreed lays with you, not the coach?
 - ➔ Are you committed to the schedule of sessions agreed between you and the coach?

- A good coaching relationship relies on openness. You have a responsibility to provide open feedback to the coach as to what is or is not working in the relationship.
- A related issue is how long a coaching relationship should last. There is no single answer – typically they would run from six to twelve months – but there are a number of considerations:

- Are we just having interesting conversations, but nothing new is coming out of our sessions?
- Am I reluctant to share what I'm really feeling and thinking?
- Is the coach trying to push their view of the world on me?
- Does the coach continually talk over me?
- Is the coach not asking what for me is the next obvious question?
- Am I not really committed – for whatever reason – to the outcomes we may have agreed?
- Is it going to be difficult for me to pay the next invoice?

INSIDER TIPS!

1. This is a critical part of the process – perhaps the most critical because it impacts directly on the benefit you will get from the coaching relationship.

2. Agree that the coach will only share his/her experiences with you with your permission – this moves the conversation to mentoring which is fine but should only be temporary.

3. Remember that the coach is giving you all of his/her attention and will expect the same from you. So make sure there are no external avoidable interruptions.

7. How will I measure the value of coaching?

- Frankly, it's difficult to identify whether coaching has a direct impact on the bottom line, because of all the other things that affect business performance. However, studies have shown that coaching positively influences productivity, quality and customer service and helps you keep your best employees.*

** Source: 'Coaching and buying coaching services', Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (www.cipd.co.uk) November 2008.*

- The same report identified the following benefits for coaching:

- 99% felt that 'coaching can deliver tangible benefits both to individuals and organisations'.

- 92% agreed that 'when coaching is managed effectively it can have a positive impact on the bottom line'.
- 67% of respondents felt that coaching had been 'effective' or 'very effective'.

● In addition, a report by the International Coaching Federation (2008) found a wide range of benefits reported by people who had been coached which included:

- Increased self awareness 68%
- Better goal setting 62%
- More balanced life 61%
- Lower stress levels 57%

INSIDER TIPS!

1. Setting clear goals for what you want to get out of coaching has a major impact on the likelihood of success.

2. Ask someone who's views you value to keep a diary of what they see you doing differently (and better!).

3. Be clear with your coach about what's working and what's not working for you.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this Guide. If you have any comments or questions then please don't hesitate to email me at chris@chrisfarrance.co.uk

I look forward to hearing from you.

Chris Farrance