

Redefining the meaning of feedback and creating a unique feedback pattern

Elspeth Campbell

Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to develop a meaningful feedback process that enables the stakeholders to determine the success of the coaching.

Description

During the contracting phase for a piece of coaching, we aim to develop a feedback pattern that requires the client to evaluate the coaching with their stakeholders, including their line manager. The line manager takes responsibility to feed back to the coach useful effects of coaching. This has a dual purpose:

- confidentiality – a safe coaching space can be created for the client to discover, become vulnerable, experiment;
- it prepares fertile ground for growth in the client as their stakeholders notice the effects of coaching.

Process

- 1 Brief the sponsor commissioning the coaching about this approach at project inception, covering the points above. This key discussion is crucial in establishing a shared understanding of how the potential power of coaching can be realised with helpful structures in place. Possible constraints to a mutual understanding are:

- if the sponsor's approach requires that the coach is chosen through a chemistry meeting, the sponsor may resist having this discussion beforehand;
- if the sponsor's primary purpose is to discover more about the coachee's performance from the coach, the coaching effectively becomes construed as a replacement for line managing the individual.

It could be that at this initial phase of contracting it is discovered that the sponsor's and the coach's approach to coaching differ too greatly, so it may become necessary for the coach to decline the project.

- 2 Discuss confidentiality during the initial meeting so that the client understands how the feedback process ensures confidentiality and learning transfer. It is useful here to start with exploring how the coachee would view a breach of confidentiality.
- 3 Run part of the second coaching session as a contracting meeting, including the line manager, and other sponsor if appropriate, where the feedback process is explored. The contracting meeting needs careful planning so that both the coachee and the line manager can express themselves in constructive ways that pave the way for useful conversations in future. It is advisable to discuss this with the line manager beforehand so that s/he has an idea of what is expected of her/him.
- 4 Encourage the coachee to make contact with people in the organization to ensure confidentiality. Where this is not appropriate, communication with the organization is done with the coachee's permission and the coachee is copied in to the communication.
- 5 Only feed back to the sponsor impressions of the organization, themes of patterns emerging, etc., once the client's contract has been completed.

Pitfalls

A possible pitfall is the sponsor's eagerness to know of the coach's impressions of the organization. These can be given without specific reference to the coachee. The sponsor

sometimes needs some reassurance and so it's helpful to keep in good contact.

Bibliography

Leimon, A., Moscovici, F. and McMahon, G. (2005) *Essential Business Coaching*, Hove: Brunner-Routledge.