



THE BUSINESS PROPOSITION FOR PROFESSIONAL COACHING

The business case on why coaching will improve business results

- **Why use a professional coach?**

The ultimate reason for using a professional coach is to improve business results. This means increasing profits, reducing costs or both. However, the inclusion of both business factors, and the people who create the profits, is the key to achieving successful business results. The business proposition is that professional coaching will be instrumental in improving the success of a business by helping the key players to think, analyse, behave, act and influence in a way which will raise performance levels. Research has established this success in terms of gains in financial performance, productivity, quality, customer satisfaction and from the perspective of improved individual and team performance as well as personal achievement. This success, of course, is conditional on the coaching being carried out professionally and expertly in ways appropriate to the needs of the individual and in clear support of the organisation's aims and strategy.

At senior levels, real success depends more on personal effectiveness as a leader rather than on formal knowledge although one without the other is, of course, insufficient. Soft skills such as leadership, people management, communication, and team-working are obviously of great importance and additionally, great store is set on the ability to think strategically, manage change, develop the organisation, manage risk and develop working partnerships. Such skills at senior levels have superseded financial and operational management skills as the key skills which will ensure business success, although these softer skills should overlay and help to implement the harder-edged skills.

Finally, the differences between an outstanding leader and a good leader comes down to emotional intelligence and the ability to inspire others to follow their lead and commit to the goals of the business. A leader can be understated or outgoing but they must convey passion and belief, sense the environment, know and be in tune with their people and have the ability to do the 'hearts and minds' stuff.

- **What is involved in Coaching?**

There is no quick fix or one-size-fits-all coaching process. Although there are general rules and good practice to fall back on, each individual and organisation is different and requires separate consideration. Effective coaching requires providers to be flexible in their approach in which they employ business and psychological skills and varied techniques to tailor the coaching interventions. These interventions, of course, are designed to support organisational aims and objectives, and deliver measurable outcomes.

- **Where will you see the impact of coaching?**

In practical terms, there are 4 key areas where using professional coaches can help business leaders improve the performance of their business.

1. The Short-Term Delivery and Execution of Results:

How many senior managers spend too much time working in the business and not enough time on the business? Time must be made to step back to shape, guide, influence, cajole and overcome blockages to progress. We know that there is enormous variability in performance from similar work groups but how often are senior managers accused of making decisions too early to resolve these differences?

A major mistake for leaders is to get too close to the business, they don't stand back and look at fundamentals, they make no time to spot opportunities and they don't deliver simple messages to allow people to connect. They allow too much complacency and permit obstacles to block progress. They fail to create short-term wins. Another mistake is to believe in non-definitive progress (e.g. "it'll be fine; things are going well".) This isn't good enough if you are going to make the right decisions at the right time to ensure that 'key indicators' are achieved or exceeded.

2. The Longer-Term Strategic Growth, Vision and Strategic Development of the Business

Our biggest competitor is ourselves because we are often too slow to deal with the need for change and to drive change. Change needs to be driven by a vision; a clear vision which is easily communicated and easily understood. The vision comes from having a good sense of the market and our environment, and the vision must be compelling to set direction and inspire and commit a following. The vision must also be simple. It must be a front-page headline which is easy to understand.....more Sun than Times.

The outstanding leader also needs the intellectual depth to 'identify' the 'big ideas' which will differentiate the business from its competitors. When was a business ever satisfied with their entrepreneurship and their ability to continually reinvent themselves and 'package' or 'frame' their services to excite clients and potential clients to keep ahead of their pack of competitors?

3. Providing Team Leadership

People are not your greatest asset....but the right people who perform are your greatest asset. Outstanding leaders need to have the insight, perceptiveness and skills to select the right people, retain and motivate the right people, and develop, coach, and stretch them to raise their performance levels. In addition, leaders need to manage underperformance. Effective executives create more efficient and satisfied employees who create more satisfied clients who create higher profits.

A major mistake of weak leaders is to hang on for too long to under-performers. People in the business know that you're not serious about performance if you accommodate under-performers. If you're serious you will work with people to coach, stretch and develop them to raise their game.

In selecting staff, attitude is more important than skill although one without the other is not sufficient. A major mistake of weak leaders is the failure to challenge people quickly enough. How many times have senior managers been accused of addressing a performance problem too early?

In terms of motivating and developing staff, you cannot make everyone champions on your own but great leaders can create the environment to create champions, and part of this process is creating 'teamship' rules that team members will buy into.

4. Meeting the Multiple Expectations of Different Groups

Great leaders get used to living in a glass bowl. People make it their business to look, interpret, conclude, gossip and build their confidence or otherwise in a leader based on patchy data from ad hoc observations and soundbites. All leaders have multiple audiences and stakeholders which might include a Board with different Executive and Non-Executive expectations, immediate colleagues, immediate direct team and wider teams for whom there are indirect responsibilities. Externally, there are client stakeholders, possibly shareholders, and a local community who may have an interest in the organisation. Each group has different needs and savvy leaders recognise the requirement to play to the needs of different audiences.

The best leaders convey a strong sense of values about what the business stands for. They are good listeners who make people feel good about themselves. They are aware and sensitive to others' needs and so command respect. They have a good memory for names, previous contacts as well as business performance with individual clients. The best leaders don't debate yesterday; they are forward-looking and forward-thinking. Best leaders deal with the person as an individual; poor leaders deal with the 'disease'.

What a coach can do

In many ways, the coach's job is to help clients assess and push their comfort levels in the areas just described. Often, a serious upgrade in performance will require a visit to the outside of one's comfort zone. The coach will clarify personal drivers, needs and values and the client will be challenged to overcome limiting beliefs and negative behaviours, and 'up their game'.

A coach is also a calibrating influence. How is success measured? How is performance rated? How confident in percentage terms are you that business plans will be achieved? How will we define progress? When does high performance happen? How will we recognise it? How can it be replicated?

Coaches can help prompt and shape the key business messages and strategies. The experienced coach can help to translate the codes, messages and behaviours displayed in response to the senior executive. This can help to save a great deal of lost time and painful frustration.

A coach should also have 'permission' to discuss the executive's impact on the business. Does the way they present themselves match the business goals? What messages do they send in their response to various issues? What messages do they want to send? Would they be comfortable with change? A coach can help leaders manage change because change involves working with key decision-makers who need to be incrementally influenced and coordinated. In order to manage change, the executive also needs to be grounded in understanding how their people need to perform in order to achieve their mutual goals. Change is based on the belief that in order to achieve sustained growth in revenues and profits, business leaders must take their employees with them.

Coaches can also observe, assess and provide feedback to clients about their communication and behavioural team leadership and relationship building style. This can be crucial. People rarely accurately judge the impact of their own style and a coach can be essential to this process. Careful incremental feedback can then be energising and motivating.

The coach can also help with the question of balanced judgement. They can help to maintain a sense of perspective. They can help the executive look for causes rather than excuses. They can identify blockages. They can help to fix problems rather than apportion blame. Or they may just act as a supportive confidante to provide reassurance and increase an executive's confidence in the appropriateness of a particular decision or strategy.