



## **What does a Career Coach in HR do?**

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Many organizations are appointing a member, or members of the HR staff, as internal career coaches. This may be a full time role or as an 'add on' to existing duties. The motivation is likely to be multi faceted. Concerned with the cost of replacement turnover, loss of valued staff, lack of suitable successors for key positions, evidence that line managers are avoiding their responsibilities for staff career development, or to support a learning and development culture. Another motivation frequently cited is exasperation by senior managers that staff do little to learn about and apply career self-management to their individual workplace situations.

A career coach-at-work acts as both a catalyst and facilitator of employee development. Their primary purpose is the retention of human resources and fostering of an 'emotional engagement' to their work and the objectives of their employer. Career coaches are charged to connect people with their passion, purpose, values and other critical aspects of their nature, which they bring to work. Effective career coaching leads to commitment to develop 'right action' for both the individual and organisation.

### **Careers coaches-at-work do the following:**

- Connect staff with a deeper level of motivation than 'just a job'. Staff are facilitated to discover their passion and purpose to guide their decisions, empowering them to propose work content they can enjoy, not just tolerate.
- Probe for openings that lead to long-term developmental opportunities, rather than providing just a 'quick fix' to individual career concerns.
- Create effective coaching interactions by listening, observing, discerning and modeling.
- Deliver effective coaching through feedback, questions, statements, challenges and ideas.
- Remove blocks perceived by individual staff to career progress, including such developmental needs as communication, interpersonal skills, lack of clarity, limiting beliefs, incomplete awareness of marketable skills, lack of purpose and more.



- Improve the employee's ability to market and sell themselves in the internal job market.
- Increase individual potential for career growth and future earning power.
- Assist staff in becoming 'career self-reliant', taking control and ownership of their own career development.
- Increase the employee's awareness of career paths and enhance fit to achieve 'right person/right job'.
- Improve the capability of both staff and organisation to manage constant change and transition.
- Promote a win-win balance of work/life priorities, using the desired states of both individual and organisation as benchmarks.
- Recommend changes to organisational systems to evolve the employment culture by increasingly valuing employees, implementing career development as a priority and retaining human capital.

The above can be summarised in a different way as follows:

### **1. Educate**

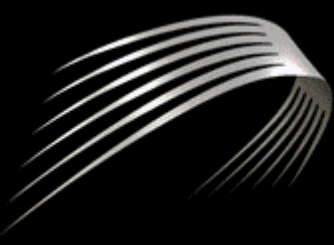
To educate staff in the area of career self-management in order to help empower them to take responsibility for their own career mobility and job productivity and continued employability.

### **2. Guide**

To guide staff in the use of specific career analysis and planning methods for the purpose of enhancing their self-confidence and developing a deeper partnership between their changing individual needs and the organisation's goals.

### **3. Support**

To coach and support staff to take specific career initiatives that would result in increased work satisfaction and productivity.



In essence provision of internal career coaching is a learning partnership between the company and the staff for optimising individual career success, contribution to customer service problem-solving and productivity. It is not a placement or outplacement program.

### **Differences with Mentors**

Mentors provide for staff visions of their future based on the mentors expertise and wisdom. Mentors usually have experience at senior management level and are often regarded as experts in their field, whilst career coaches' expertise is their coaching skill.

Mentors freely give advice and opinions regarding strategies but the career coach seeks to evoke answers from the client and fosters career problem solving by the employees own actions.

### **Common mistakes in career coaching**

***Assuming that career coaching is only about career matters - incorporate a holistic perspective.*** It's been said that we take our whole self to work, not just a compartmentalised portion. Fixing a flat tire won't help a car run if it's also out of gas. Likewise, focusing only on career topics won't be as effective if the employee being coached also needs to address areas such as finances, family, life balance, spiritual, and so on. Yes, the focal point may certainly be work-related matters, but avoiding or shying away from other aspects of their life may leave the career coach wondering why the employee isn't moving forward.

***Assuming that the employee is telling the coach the truth - get at the truth... the whole truth.*** Pride often gets in the way of people speaking the truth. When the coach has earned the employee's trust, he/she will often disclose insecurities, concerns, as well as career-related problems. Also, what the employee perceives to be unimportant may be forgotten or glossed over in conversation with the coach. If you don't ask questions (and then be comfortable with the silence and listen), you won't know anything beyond what the employee tells you. Related to this is the assumption that the first goal out of the employee's mouth is, indeed, the best goal. It may be that the true target will emerge later in the course of the coaching relationship. Get at the truth... the whole truth.

***Assuming the employee needs excessive encouragement - do NOT cheerlead to the point of condescension.*** A word of encouragement, praise for a task well done, confirmation of the strengths, or acknowledgment of another person's positive comments about the employee is certainly appropriate in the coaching relationship. Be watchful, however, that tone of voice and approach is on an adult-to-adult 'equals' relationship as opposed to



an adult-to-child or parent-to-child relationship. Ask yourself if you'd be comfortable on the receiving end of your cheerleading. Do NOT cheerlead about the organization that employs both of you to the point of condescension.

***Assuming that the employee wants to hear about you - do NOT over-talk.*** There will be times when it is appropriate for you to share a personal comment or brief account that relates to the employee's situation. However, coaching sessions should not follow the flow of a typical conversation. This is not the time to share lots of personal stories. The focus should stay on the person, not you. It's about THEM, not you.

***Assuming that employees with certain skills are the same - solutions are rarely cloneable.*** Commonalities will be present with certain people and personality types. Think MBTI. However, avoid assuming that because some factors are the same, they are all the same. Keep probing and listening intently - you'll unearth threads that when woven together produce the right fit for the person.

***Assuming that your client's situation has only one solution - watch for tunnel vision.*** If an employee is unhappy in a particular career situation, the most readily apparent solution often centres on getting a similar position with a different employer. In some cases, this is appropriate. However, people frequently settle for second best because they believe there is no other option. Ask, "What are some other options/perspectives that might be overlooked at the moment?" As a career coach, you have the opportunity to invite them to see the bigger picture... to step into the future as a whole, creative and successful person... to scratch at more than just the surface... to help them find the traction to get out of a rut... to challenge them to combine their strengths, interests, values, and purpose into an ideal career that will be uniquely satisfying to them.

***Assuming you can multi-task while listening to the employee - stay 100% focused.*** Nothing replaces deep listening and a 'full presence' with staff being coached. They are giving of their time for your ear, as well as your expertise. Listen a good deal more than you talk. Give your full attention so you don't miss important information or attitudes. This is not a good time to be multitasking (reading email, doing paperwork, answering an instant message, etc.). If the staff member feels you are not totally interested in them or that they are not an important part of your business, they will be less inclined to tell you how you can best coach them, and you will miss getting to the heart of the situation.

***Assuming that every coached employee will follow through - clarify intentions and commitment to action.*** Sometimes staff will seem energised about proposed action steps but lack in the follow-through. Get at the truth by



questioning their intentions and find out how serious they are about making a change that works. Ask, “When do you plan to do that?” Or, “What support do you need to ensure this happens?” Or, “On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 highest, how committed are you to completing that task?” If clients come back the following week NOT having completed their action items, ask, “What got in the way?” or “What would you like me to say when you haven’t followed through?”

***Assuming that the person has the same ethical standards as yours - don’t judge.*** People are full of surprises. Not all values and ethics are congruent with others. Be ready to be surprised without being judgmental. A respectful curiosity, “Tell me more about that” or “How do those values align with your current work situation?” or “What would need to change in your work situation so that it’s in sync with your priorities?”

***Assuming the employee knows less than you do - avoid thinking “I have all the answers so let me find an opening in the conversation to tell you how to do things!”***

Telling people what to do rarely works. If you fall into the trap of solving problems or suggesting answers (before tapping into the person’s creativity in these areas), you rob the staff member of his or her opportunity to find their brilliance. If so, your coaching relationships will be very, very short. Yes, you may know more about the topic of career development and career self-management, but that doesn’t mean the staff member is not as bright (or brighter) than you are. Before jumping into a litany of how-to’s on a subject, say something like, “What ideas have been coming up for you on this?” Checking out their level of knowledge is time well spent. If the person has run out of ideas, consider prefacing your comments with a statement such as, “May I offer a suggestion? This particular strategy has worked well for others who have been in a similar situation.” Or, “Would it be helpful to brainstorm around that together? You start, then I’ll offer an idea, then back to you...”

**Investment by an employer in an internal career coaching service requires an ROI. HR practitioners appointed to carry such a role owe to themselves and this investment to be continual learners of the many vagaries and challenges of career development.**

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