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CREATING AN INTERNAL COACHING PROGRAM

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HUMAN CAPITAL

CREATING AN INTERNAL COACHING PROGRAM



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Everywhere you look, coaching has become an important aspect of talent development. From executive coaching to peer coaching to team coaching, coaching continues to be a fast-growing talent development solution. In 2012, the International Coach Federation (ICF) estimated that there are 47,500 professional coaches worldwide who generate nearly \$2 billion in revenue annually—and the number of individuals who are becoming coaches continues to grow.

For many years, expensive coaching programs were perceived as an exclusive perk meant to address the challenging support and development needs of senior executives and emerging leaders. Much of this coaching was, and still is, provided as needed or administered in support of a leadership program with a clear start and end date.

Additionally, coaching was outsourced. For many years, talent development managers believed that only external coaches would meet the credibility, objectivity, and ethical standards required to coach effectively.

Today, however, more organizations recognize the value of providing coaching beyond the executive suite and are using internal coaches to do so. Internal coaches are individuals who may not be certified as professional coaches, but who are trained in a set of coaching skills to support a specific business strategy. Coaching, provided by internal coaches, is now offered to new hires, salespeople, and midlevel managers.

This *TD at Work* outlines the various types of coaching programs that can be implemented using internal coaches. This *TD at Work* will:

- Define internal coaching and outline how it is unique.
- Explain the benefits of internal coaching for coach, coachee, the learning and development (L&D) function, and the organization as a whole.
- Show the types of coaching programs that can be implemented with internal coaches, including sales coaching, new hire coaching, and mentor coaching.
- Provide case studies for various types of internal coaching.

INTERNAL COACHING FUNDAMENTALS

Ongoing challenges from the tightened economy have placed pressures on employees at every level. Frontline salespeople have been asked to deliver revenue with fewer resources at their disposal; middle managers have had to produce the same, or improved, outcomes with smaller teams and budgets; and executives have been faced with the challenge of providing a compelling vision and improved business strategy to keep their businesses alive and thriving. Though many organizations have cut training budgets to satisfy cash flow needs or short-term profit demands, most business leaders still know that their people need development to overcome their specific challenges and ultimately reach their goals. The real issue is not whether to invest, but rather, which development solutions to invest in. Many times, coaching provided by internal coaches can be a valuable solution.

While coaching has become more common, it's important to define what internal coaching is, and how it works. The fundamental purpose of coaching is to help someone move toward a goal that is important, yet difficult to achieve satisfactorily or quickly on his own. Using a facilitated process and methodology, coaches ask questions of the coachee to help them create their own solutions in moving forward. Coaches are available to help people with their business, their life, their health, and their work within the context of an organization.

What Is Internal Coaching?

Internal coaching does not define a type of coaching, but rather identifies who provides the coaching. Simply put, an external coach is an individual who is self-employed or employed outside the organization and provides coaching services within the organization. Conversely, an internal coach is an individual who is a regular employee of the organization in which she is providing coaching.

Internal coaches may or may not be certified as professional coaches by a coach certification organization, such as the International Coach

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF A GREAT INTERNAL COACH

While anybody can be an internal coach, there are few key characteristics that make an individual a great internal coach. These include:

- **A great reputation.** Having a positive reputation in the organization is the most important characteristic of an internal coach. If an internal coach isn't respected and doesn't have a positive reputation within the organization for her coaching practice, none of the other characteristics listed below matter.
- **Being a great listener.** Some people are great storytellers, teachers, and mentors, but a great coach needs to be a great listener as well. Coaches need to be able to hear and understand what is said as well as detect that which is left unsaid.
- **Basic coaching skills.** Great coaches have at least a basic level of training. Although more internal coaches are becoming professionally certified, internal coaches that are self-taught through books or trained through one-day programs or short courses on basic coaching skills can still succeed in coaching fellow employees.
- **Relevant job knowledge or experience.** Coaching purists may argue that coaches do not need to have any relevant job knowledge to coach others; however, in practice, great coaches have some level of experience in the coachee's field. Having an understanding of the coachee's job function makes the coach more credible and provides the coach with necessary context when coaching.
- **Maturity.** Great internal coaches are mature. They understand the political nuances of the workplace and have the awareness to recognize situations that create potential conflicts of interest without having every rule and possible scenario spelled out for them prior to engaging in coaching. More importantly, they fully understand the issue of confidentiality.

While these are the key characteristics of an internal coach, great coaching work is dependent on a clear process or set of guidelines for the coaching to work, including a matching and selection process that allows the coachee to select the coach she wants.

Federation (ICF) or the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), but typically have some basic level of training in coaching. In general, external coaches are still utilized to provide executive or leadership coaching; however, some organizations are growing coaching capability within their roster of internal coaches so that they can provide coaching to executives and emerging leaders as well.

INTERNAL COACHES ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO MAY NOT BE CERTIFIED AS PROFESSIONAL COACHES, BUT WHO ARE TRAINED IN A SET OF COACHING SKILLS TO SUPPORT A SPECIFIC BUSINESS STRATEGY.

Unique Aspects of Internal Coaching

Just as there are many development solutions, there are many characteristics that make internal coaching unique. They include the following facets.

- **Company and culture knowledge:** Internal coaches have basic knowledge and understanding of the business and political landscape.
- **No direct costs:** Since the costs of the internal coach are absorbed into overhead, it may be easier for individuals to secure a coach when budgets for direct expenses might be tight or scrutinized. It may, however, be a myth that the internal coach actually costs less than the external coach. It simply depends on the cost of the external coach versus the hourly rate of the internal coach.
- **Specific and relevant job knowledge:** At times it can benefit the coachee to work with a coach who has specific and relevant knowledge about the job the coachee does. This is especially true in mentor coaching in which the coach not only provides coaching, but also provides mentoring (sharing of personal experiences, teaching, advising, and so forth).

Finally, while many managers of coaching programs believe that the biggest considerations around internal coaching are confidentiality and ethics (for example, determining whether or not a mentor coach of someone under review for succession planning should offer up information about the coachee that could sway the decision makers), in practice, these issues are typically no different than the types of ethical considerations external coaches may face.

WAYS COACHING IS PROVIDED WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION

There is a great variety in the way that coaching looks within an organization, as shown in the Coaching Continuum sidebar. For example, at one end of the coaching continuum is executive coaching or leadership coaching. Typically, this type of coaching is provided by a professionally certified coach who works outside of the organization at a coaching firm. At the other end of the coaching continuum is self-coaching. Self-coaching is a specific method that an individual uses to facilitate her own process to move forward. In other words, in self-coaching the coachees coach themselves.

Within the middle of the coaching continuum is a wide variety of ways that coaching is employed, including a manager who learns and uses coaching skills to manage and lead his team; a human resources professional who learns and uses coaching skills to facilitate a single coaching conversation, known as spot coaching; or an individual who learns and uses coaching skills to assist a new hire in quickly building her proficiency.

ESTABLISHING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

At its core, the fundamental philosophy behind coaching is that individuals have the knowledge within them to be successful in their roles. In its purest form, coaches do not teach, tell, or provide advice, but instead ask questions of the

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coachee to help facilitate the coachee’s thinking. Sir John Whitmore, along with Alan Fine and other coaches, developed the GROW Model—Goal, Current Reality, Options, and Will—of coaching, whereby the coach facilitates the coachee making decisions for himself.

For coaching to be successful in any organization, the culture must support the belief that people hold their own answers and coaching can help them find those answers. Additionally, the culture must understand the distinction between coaching and “telling” or “giving correctional feedback.”

In internal coaching, the coach comes from within the culture, rather than outside of the organization. That very fact lends itself well to creating a coaching culture that supports coaching overall, more than using an external coach does. As coachees participate in coaching, their problem-solving skills and conversations become more advanced and naturally cause a ripple effect in the rest of the organization. When internal coaches also play a role in spreading coaching-oriented conversations, the culture becomes more coaching-focused. All of this is to say, you can create a culture conducive to internal coaching, simply by beginning. Of course, if internal coaching is a significant leap for an organization, then it is important to implement education, pilot studies, and test groups to help lay the foundation for introducing internal coaching on a broader scale.