
Taming the Wild West of Coaching

Corporate Coaching Standards



Title	Taming the Wild West of Coaching
Authors	John Blakey(1), Bill Barry(2) & John Jackson(3)
Document Type	Article
Subject Terms	*EXECUTIVES *HR DIRECTORS of corporations *BUSINESS PEOPLE *COACHING in organizations *COACHING STANDARDS *EXECUTIVE coaching
Abstract	This article focuses upon the current debate surrounding corporate coaching standards. Using the analogy of the 'Wild West, the article explores the outcome of a 'roundtable' discussion between 20 HR Directors / Managers and members of the UK Board of the ICF (International Coach Federation) and the EMCC (European mentoring and Coaching Council). Issues covered include the definition of coaching, its core competencies, the alignment of coaching with HR best practice and the best role for the various professional bodies involved.
Author Affiliations	Partners and Co-Founders of 121coaching (1,2,&3) Director of Coaching & Ex-International Managing Director – LogicaCMG plc (1) Olympic Coach & Ex-CEO FCB Advertising (2) HR Director & Consultant (3)
Full Text Word Count	2589

1. Howdy Partners !

On 1st March, 2005 an impressive posse of HR Managers gathered amidst the special atmosphere of the Leander Club, Henley. They had come to an event themed around taming the wild west of corporate coaching and were joined by representatives from the UK Board of the ICF (International Coach Federation), the EMCC (European Mentoring and Coaching Council) and the BPS SGCP (British Psychological Society Special Group in Coaching Psychology).

The event was hosted by 121coaching and chaired by one of its partners, John Blakey. The attendees had gathered to engage in discussion around the most pressing topic in the world of corporate coaching - the issue of standards, ethics, training, accreditation and regulation in this young and rapidly growing profession.

The seed had been sown for this event back in July 2004 when the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development) 2004 survey (1) used the 'wild west' as a metaphor to describe the coaching and mentoring industry and the biggest concerns of HR directors who use coaching services were summarised as :-

- *the lack of accreditation and regulation (40% found this issue to be 'very worrying')*
- *lack of clarity in defining exactly what coaching is and what it isn't (81% felt this was an issue)*
- *lack of a single authoritative and objective source of information on the quality, rigour and credibility of all the different coaching offerings (45% said this would be a useful development).*

The objective of this event was to bring together the corporate buyers of coaching and explore the UK's ' coaching frontier' in a light hearted and entertaining way, whilst keeping the serious issues in our gun sights. Is there any hope of taming the Wild West of coaching in the UK?

1. Coaching Standards in the UK - 'State of the Nation' Address

Pauline Willis, the invited speaker, provided an overview of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council's consultative research project. This project has involved the integration of both coaching and mentoring competency and standards frameworks from the UK and internationally and includes the International Coach Federation (ICF) competency framework amongst others.

The EMCC project has culminated in the release of a comprehensive, integrated competency map for both coaching and mentoring and this has had significant impact across the coaching and mentoring industry both in the UK as well as internationally.

Core competencies for the coach outlined in Pauline's presentation included :-

- *Professional Practice Skills (e.g. contracting, relationship management)*
- *Listening and Communication skills*
- *Working effectively with coachee's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours*
- *Belief in the potential for others to grow and develop*
- *Maintaining focus on positive outcomes (either long or short term)*
- *Self awareness, confidence and personal presence*

'Specialist' or 'advanced' competencies included :-

- *Psychological models, methods and practices*
- *Business and management development theory and practice*
- *Critical Thinking Skills*
- *Artistic and Creative Skills*
- *Domain or role specific experience e.g. management or leadership*
- *Assessment Skills e.g. psychological profiling and business analysis*

Secondly, the research has resulted in a matrix that allows coaches to be mapped with coachees based upon their background, training and experience. The matrix is shown below :-



©2004 Lauriate Ltd, All Rights Reserved

For example, a coach may display all the required core competencies shown in the center of the matrix but their effectiveness with a given executive may be affected dramatically by their background and training whether that be as a psychological coach or a life coach or a coach focusing upon specific business skills. Alongside core competencies, this background and prior training must be taken into account when making an effective match of coach and coachee.

2. 'Digging for Gold'

To help digest Pauline's presentation, delegates took a brisk and bracing stroll in pairs along the Thames riverbank. They were asked to find their one 'gold nugget' from the presentation whether that be an insight, a question or a follow up idea.

The 'gold nuggets' came in many different shapes and sizes. Dave Vachell from BT queried why sports coaching was not featured in the matrix model given how mature the coaching role is in the sporting world. Bill Barry, 121 partner and Olympic medallist / business coach, reinforced this point adding that there was scope for the best of business and sports coaching to come together more closely. Chris Spencer from John Lewis speculated that maybe we were searching for 'fools gold' by trying to find similarities in coaching and mentoring skills rather than accepting that they are two very different roles. Pauline noted that there are people who argue

passionately for specific definitions of coaching and mentoring whilst others argue that it is there is significant overlap. The lack of agreement over definitions was one of the drivers for the EMCC to ensure that the design of the Standards Project supports future work towards the refinement of coaching and mentoring definitions.

Both Judy Rowley from Haringey and Martin O'Neill from Watson Wyatt expressed frustration that it was taking so long for the professional bodies to arrive at a common conclusion to these questions. Liz Hartley from Thomson University raised the important issue of how this research applied outside the culture of the UK since global companies needed an internationally agreed framework. Finally, Liz Macann from the BBC added a new dimension to the coaching core competencies by referring to a coach's 'signature presence' (4) as equally important to a coach's effectiveness as other more 'mechanical' skills.

3. Designing the Lasso

Like a bar of soap, it would have been easy for the topic of corporate coaching standards to slip through the group's collective grasp. They needed to tie it down. They needed a lasso ! To start, they needed to share and own a common definition of what corporate coaching was for them. All had previously read many different definitions. Some of the current favourites being :-

<i>'A process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve.'</i>	<i>Parsloe (1999)</i>
<i>'Unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance.'</i>	<i>Whitmore (1996)</i>
<i>'Primarily a short-term intervention aimed at performance improvement or developing a particular competence.'</i>	<i>Clutterbuck (2003)</i>
<i>'A conversation, or series of conversations, one person has with another.'</i>	<i>Starr (2003)</i>

But what was the view of the corporate purchasers of coaching services represented by the delegates at this event? To find out, each delegate was asked to create his or her own best definition of coaching. Having collected all the responses, these were put to the vote in order to find the group's choice for the best definition of coaching in a corporate context.

The 'Top 3' definitions were:

- 1. 'A powerful process which allows an individual, a team and an organisation to unlock their own potential through self-awareness and action.'***
- 2. 'The unlocking of potential from individuals, teams and organisations by a process of open questioning, challenge, goal-setting and exercising choice to effect change.'***
- 3. 'A planned approach to supporting others to understand, explore and increase their contribution.'***

Taming the Wild West of Coaching

Corporate Coaching Standards



Congratulations to Sue Holly-Rodway from Cap Gemini Ernst & Young who penned the 'winning' definition.

The second loop of our lasso involved asking the group to identify the single most important role that should be played by the coaching professional bodies. A similar question had been asked in the CIPD 2004 survey (1) and had produced the following results :-

<i>Possible roles</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Providing information and advice</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>Providing training courses and qualifications</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>Providing a code of ethics and standards that all coaches must adhere to</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Accrediting courses and qualifications</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>Providing research/information/publications on coaching</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Monitoring the continuing professional development of coaches</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Providing a register of approved coaches</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Dealing with any complaints about member coaches</i>	<i>37</i>

Once analysed, the group's 'snapshot' gave the following 'Top 3' responses :-

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Maintaining a code of ethics and standards</i>2. <i>Maintenance of a code that members agree to be bound by</i>3. <i>'Be the BMA of professional coaching'</i> |
|---|

Once again the top two responses had a lot in common. Both stressed the importance of a code of ethics and both demonstrate a belief that the professional coaching bodies should develop and maintain this as their primary role.

The No.2 response adds another interesting twist in the phrase '...which members agreed to bound by' implying the full involvement and active commitment of member individuals and organisations. This 'self policing' concept is a powerful idea in uniting the cause of both professional bodies and corporate organizations.

In response to this, Philip Brew from the ICF, Gil Schwenk from the EMCC and Pauline Willis, as a representative of the SGCP, confirmed that their organizations have well established codes of ethics to which members agree to be bound. All of the bodies also operate disciplinary processes for their members who breach the code and in the case of serious breaches members can be excluded, so it would seem that the professional bodies are already addressing this need.

The No.3 response provides a great 'soundbite' aspiration for the professional bodies. Whilst the BMA (British Medical Association) has had its fair share of criticism over the years, it does successfully regulate a centuries-old profession where it really is a matter of life and death. We

felt that this could represent a useful benchmark of maturity and professionalism for the corporate coaching world.

Again, we asked our representatives from the EMCC, the UK ICF and the BPS SGCP what they thought about this. A common view seemed to be that it would be near to impossible for one mega-body like a coaching equivalent of the BMA to regulate every aspect of coaching and mentoring practice in the UK. Instead the range of professional coaching and mentoring associations and bodies provides both diversity and choice both for coaching service providers and also the consumers of coaching services.

The big surprise of the day was that the main bodies identified by the CIPD are working together, so whilst the cowboys have been shooting it out down in corral, the professional bodies have been quietly smoking the 'peace pipe' that will bring greater clarity to the developing profession. The dual aims of serving both the providers of coaching services as well as providing some protection for the consumers of these services appear to be high on the agenda for the UK ICF, the EMCC and the SGCP.

4. The Magnificent Seven

True to our Western theme, how could Yul Brunner and his boys be left out of the equation? As the stirring soundtrack filled the meeting room, seven became the magic number.....almost !

First, the focus was on developing the seven core principles and standards of effective coaching and later attention turned to establishing seven 'top tips' for integrating coaching with HR best practise. The first question taxed the delegates to such an extent that they had to settle for the 'fantastic four' rather than the 'magnificent seven' ! Their discussion highlighted how difficult it is to distinguish between a standard, an ethic, a principle and a competence. All fine words but what exactly do they mean in practise ?

Nevertheless, the 'fantastic four' can be revealed as :-

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Establishing a 3-way, clear and transparent contract between coach, coachee and organisation.</i>2. <i>Ensuring an 'outcome orientation' – coaching must always be measurable.</i>3. <i>Ensuring that coach, coachee and organisation are mutually committed partners (MCP).</i>4. <i>Engaging coaches who subscribe to a non-directive approach ('asking not telling').</i> |
|---|

The concept of 'mutually committed partners' represented a powerful summary of many of the group's other comments. It implies an environment of equals where responsibility is shared and all parties are held accountable for their full and open engagement with the coaching assignment. A 'non directive' approach is considered sacrosanct in some coaching quarters and is undoubtedly a critical 'mind set' for effective corporate coaching.

Taming the Wild West of Coaching

Corporate Coaching Standards



The second question regarding integrating coaching with HR best practise was prompted by this observation in the CIPD Coach Buying Guide (6) :-

'The 2004 CIPD training and development survey revealed that two-thirds of respondents who indicated coaching takes place in their organisation reported that there is no formal strategy that governs coaching activities.'

Again, the group was asked for a 'magnificent seven' and this time they delivered an 'excellent eight' ! There was no stopping the creative flow and here are the resulting top tips :-

1. *Align coaching assignments with business objectives, culture and the organisational context.*
2. *Promote a perception that coaching is NOT remedial. It is for both 'stars' and 'solid citizens'*
3. *Ensure coaching assignments are owned by the line managers and seen as a business tool*
4. *Remember coaching is about securing behaviour change not ticking boxes on an HR checklist*
5. *Need to set appropriate objectives for coaching which are subsequently measured.*
6. *Need to have internal 'coaching champions' Everyone needs to **believe** in the benefits and outcomes.*
7. *Keep the language simple/avoid jargon – be careful about words like 'coaching culture' and 'authenticity'.*
8. *HR needs to provide a framework for coaching. This framework needs to include the strategy for the selection of coaches.*

By following these eight tips and establishing the four standards, the group was confident that a firm foundation for a successful corporate coaching programme would be established.

6. The 'Round Up'

Clearly corporate customers of coaching services are looking for leadership from professional bodies and some are even hoping that one body will become the 'marshall' who will 'protect and serve' so the wild west can be tamed and the country freed once and for all of those troublesome cowboys.

We found today, that many coaching service providers are in fact skilled not only in core coaching competencies, but can also bring with them a diversity of professional expertise or experience from a broad range of professional arenas which may include psychology, human resources, management and sport. The professionals clearly feel that it seems unlikely that any one coaching body would be able to 'lasso' the profession and 'police' the practice of coaching in the UK.

At the end of the day, the responsibility falls on the corporate customer to become an informed purchaser of coaching services and not expect a quick and easy solution to a complex purchasing decision. We have found today, that the sheriffs are there to support you, but it probably pays to wear a holster loaded with a couple of 'intellectually loaded' six shooters!

As a final note the CIPD offers a range of resources to support HR professionals to both understand and access the coaching marketplace. Their report (1) that is a great resource for buyers of corporate services identifies a small number of professional bodies that have emerged as leaders in the field. Increasingly, these bodies are working together on projects to bring a greater clarity to the market. Perhaps, like a wise council of Indian Chiefs, these bodies will provide the leadership that is so desperately needed to tame the 'wild west' of coaching in the UK.

Our thanks go to all of the attendees for their active participation and openness. Also, thanks to the Leander Club for their tremendous hospitality.

References

- (1) CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development) 2004 survey
- (2) 'Wild West of Coaching' – Sherman & Freas, Harvard Business Review, November, 2004
- (3) Harvard Business Review, December, 2004
- (4) 'Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart' - Mary Beth O'Neill
- (5) 'Coaching the Alpha Male – Ludeman & Erlandson, Harvard Business Review, May 2004
- (6) CIPD Coach Buying Guide, November 2004