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The
Economist

Coaching and Mentoring

What they are and
how to make the most of them

Jane Renton

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Introduction

Being a journalist by trade and British can make one doubly cynical. In setting out to detail the nascent coaching industry, which has to a degree overshadowed its more humble and less well-remunerated sister, mentoring, I also began to question whether coaching was all it was cracked up to be. Was it simply a feel-good device for the overpaid, overpampered executive of the boom years of the early 21st century? After a year of researching and endeavouring to define this curiously elusive industry, I am less cynical. I have met many remarkable, highly principled people who work as coaches or mentors, and whose motives I have no wish to impugn. But I am still struggling with my initial question. Perhaps it is more honest to acknowledge that the rise of coaching is largely explained by the growing complexity of our lives; by the fast pace of technological change; and the recognition that leadership in this environment is both tough and bewildering. We require additional help in a world that is often frighteningly non-collegiate. In this environment the coach is someone to watch over you, to encourage you without judgment and censure.

Coaches and mentors, as I have discovered, come from a variety of different backgrounds and disciplines. Some are simply rebadged trainers who have discovered that it is trendier – and better paid – to restyle themselves as coaches. But others, skilled in psychology or psychotherapy, have spent many years acquiring coach-specific qualifications. Some have no industry-specific qualifications at all. Some business coaches are driven by business needs and processes, while others are motivated by life’s “bigger picture” and a subversive desire to reform individuals and businesses. Selecting a

coach can be a hit-or-miss experience in an industry where there is still no consensus on the correct definition of coaching, or the limits of its endeavours. Clearly, research is needed to find out whether coaching really works in the long run.

This book aims to deliver a much-needed practical layman's guide. Much of the available literature on the subject is written by coaches for other coaches or would-be practitioners. Instead, I have attempted to provide the reader with some idea of where coaching sprang from by listing the psychology and business ideas that underpinned it. I have also sought to provide some guidance to anyone who plans to engage the services of either a coach or a mentor as well as outline of the some of the issues facing both coaching and mentoring. It has been no easy task, since there was no obvious beginning, middle or end, because coaching – and its poor relation mentoring – embraces so many other disciplines in other fields, such as sports and even medicine. As one coach, quoting Gertrude Stein said, “There is no there there.” Coaching is a thieving magpie that has borrowed its ideas from others. Even the more ancient art of mentoring posed problems, since there is a dearth of literature surrounding the subject.

As far as coaching's origins go, I have confined myself to focusing on a handful of psychologists and gurus from business and elsewhere who coaches themselves say have influenced their nascent industry the most. Some who read this book will no doubt argue, with some justification, that others should have been included and that my selection is too American-centric. But coaching, with its essentially optimistic leanings, is largely an American construct, which will broaden and internationalise in time, which any later editions of this book will hopefully reflect.

I have met many wonderfully kind and generous people in the course of this project who provided me with ideas, research and interviews. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their support and involvement – they know who they are. I would particularly like to acknowledge the help I received from Vikki Brock, a former Boeing executive turned business coach, who not only allowed me to read her doctoral dissertation on coaching's origins, but also provided introductions and contacts. I also

want to thank Caroline Horner, head of the i-coach academy, and mentoring experts David Clutterbuck and Julie Hay, who were similarly helpful. Since I am no psychology expert, I would like to acknowledge Tom Butler-Bowden, whose excellent books *50 Psychology Classics* and *50 Self-help Classics* provided further additional information about some of the psychologists and gurus who featured in the first two chapters of this book. Tim Hindle's *Guide to Management Ideas and Gurus* was another useful resource. I would also like to thank my publisher, Stephen Brough, at Profile Books, for giving me the opportunity to write this book as well as much-needed coaching support to chivvy me along the way.

Jane Renton
August 2009

1 The origins of coaching

*Tell me, and I will forget.
Show me, and I may remember.
Involve me, and I will understand.*

Confucius, 450 BC

The new and unregulated coaching industry derives from many different and sometimes conflicting disciplines, theories and methodologies that are both strengths and a source of confusion for those seeking its services.

It is hard to pinpoint who the world's first coach really was. It could have been some military instructor from the ancient world with a natural talent for killing and an unnatural talent for philosophy. Perhaps a more deserving recipient of that honour would be Socrates, a famous classical Greek philosopher, who possessed legendary skills in helping others achieve their goals but whose blunt speaking earned him powerful enemies and an untimely death. The father of western philosophical thought posed a series of questions, not just to solicit individual answers, but to encourage fundamental insight into the issue at hand. That most morally principled of men, Socrates said the unexamined life was not worth living. In other words an individual has to constantly challenge accepted precepts, conventions and beliefs in order to improve. It could have been lifted straight from any contemporary guide to coaching techniques. But Socrates, unlike modern coaches or the Sophists of his day, whom he attacked for their relativism, never charged a fee for his teachings. He left behind no self-help manual,

no handy five-step plans – we simply have to take his student Plato’s word for it that Socrates was on to something big.

Definitions

A quick scan of the etymological dictionaries sheds little light on coaching’s origins other than the limited knowledge that the noun “coach” derives from a “large kind of carriage”, usually of the grander variety, initially built from the mid-15th century onwards in the Hungarian town of Kocs (pronounced “coach”). The word spread throughout the rest of Europe and perhaps the only analogy that can be drawn with current executive coaches is that they helped get you from A to B, preferably in the quickest possible time, arriving the right way up and alive – no mean feat given the atrocious state of most European roads and the high levels of brigandage at the time. By the mid-19th century, the word coach began to be used as Oxford University slang for a tutor: one who carries or coaxes his student through an exam. The word also appears in the works of George Eliot, an English novelist who was a woman whose real name was Mary Anne Evans. Like the sports coach, the Oxford coach bore little resemblance to the modern version, merely instructing and imparting knowledge as would any competent teacher operating on conventional lines. The modern coach, like Socrates, asks killer questions and it is up to the client to come up with the answers and accompanying action plan.

There are many differing and sometimes conflicting interpretations of what contemporary coaching is actually about. At its most simplistic, coaching helps you to help yourself, whatever your chosen goal might be, or as Martin Lukes, a fictional anti-hero devised by *Financial Times* columnist Lucy Kellaway, puts it in Kellaway’s send-up of the corporate world, *Martin Lukes: Who Moved My BlackBerry?*, “to do better than your bestest”. Meanwhile, the coaching industry, struggling hard to achieve professional recognition, is hard pressed to come up with a more businesslike description, let alone a more grammatical one.

The definition put together in 2006 by Australian coaching

psychologists Anthony Grant and Michael Cavanagh is big on jargon but short on sex appeal:

A goal-directed, results-orientated, systematic process in which one person facilitates sustained change in another individual or group through fostering the self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee.

The International Coach Federation, the largest of the world's professional coaching organisations, elaborates on the above, insisting that “coaches do not advise clients” and that “the client has the answers”. But as a convincing “elevator pitch” – the 20-second opportunity to spell out what you do to potential clients – it somehow fails to grab, let alone explain.

Sir John Whitmore, one of coaching's early pioneers, who borrowed and then adapted the “Inner Game” sporting techniques developed by a former Harvard University tennis coach, Tim Gallwey, before bringing them to the UK, puts it more simply:

Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

Edgar Schein, a professor at MIT Sloan School of Management, now in his 80s and the first to coin the term “corporate culture”, views coaching as essentially a subset of consultancy. He defines it as:

A set of behaviours on the part of a coach (consultant) that helps the client develop a new way of seeing, feeling about and behaving in situations that are defined by the client as problematic.

Donald L. Kirkpatrick, a former national president of the American Society for Training and Development, describes coaching in entirely corporate terms:

Initiated by manager; done on a regular basis; job-oriented; being positive or corrective with emphasis on telling, training and teaching by the manager; and with the objective to improve job performance.

There is also an underlying assumption that the person being coached is willing to participate in coaching and possesses the underlying abilities and talents to achieve the goal that they set for themselves, or that has been set on their behalf.

Complexity and diversity

The struggle to define coaching is largely a result of the complexity and diversity of the professional disciplines, methodologies and theories that helped shape it, many of which date back to the early 20th century and before, especially on the psychological front.

That underlying diversity can be viewed as a strength, argues Vikki Brock, an executive coach based in Ventura, California, and the nearest the fledgling coaching industry has to its own historian:

Coaching is a consolidation and amalgamation of many fields and the integrative thinking of great pioneers.

But such diversity can also be something of a liability. It can mean a lack of clarity as to what professional coaching really is and what makes for an effective or reputable coach. There is already a great deal of confusion and disagreement about professional and ethical standards.

As part of her doctoral dissertation on coaching and human development, Brock endeavours to identify the root disciplines on which coaching is based. These are primarily:

- ▶ philosophy;
- ▶ psychology;
- ▶ consulting;
- ▶ education;
- ▶ management;
- ▶ mentoring;
- ▶ sports.

Her list also includes organisation development, sociology, training, the performing arts, career development and the so-called

12-step development programmes for addiction and other behavioural problems.

At the fringes are a group of mind/body therapists who can be crudely lumped together under the banner of the human potential movement. They include a wide and disparate array of practices such as:

- ▶ Gestalt theory - a form of psychotherapy;
- ▶ psychosynthesis - the connection of emotions to values and meaning;
- ▶ Rolfing - a form of deep tissue massage;
- ▶ bioenergetics - another form of body psychotherapy;
- ▶ the Alexander technique - a form of physical realignment;
- ▶ EST (Erhard Seminar Training) - large group awareness training practised by the Forum and Landmark;
- ▶ Silva Method (formerly Silva Mind Control) - a mixture of meditation, visualisation and positive thinking.

Nearly 45% of respondents in Brock's survey cited business as the occupation predominantly influencing the coaching industry today, with nearly 22% citing the psychology profession as the most important influence on the coaching method, while sports and education rank 10% and 8% respectively. Her findings are based on an international survey sent to 10,000 coaches, together with an extensive trawl of what has been written about coaching as well as individual interviews with over 170 coaches, many of whom helped pioneer the industry.

Early days

Coaching as a distinct discipline in its own right did not really take off until the 1990s, but early references to it began to emerge in human resources journals as far back as the mid-1930s. The first peer reviewed paper on coaching appeared in *Harvard Business Review* in 1955. At that stage coaching was seen purely in terms of supervision. Supervisors should be trained to coach staff to be more effective.

In 1930 a number of psychologists were hired by an engineering firm to study the best way of organising an office in corporate America. Some broke away in 1944 to set up a service organisation, RHR, on the premise that business leaders needed a sounding board, preferably someone who was outside their business. This RHR outsider was increasingly used to help select and recruit potential leaders and to generally bounce ideas off. At the time, RHR referred to its work as development or even counselling, but nevertheless much of its work bore striking similarities to the role undertaken by high-level executive coaches today.

Towards the end of the 1950s there was a discernible shift by clinically oriented industrial psychologists towards developmental counselling at senior management level, as it was believed that many of the operational problems experienced by businesses stemmed from senior managers' attitudes and actions.

The 1960s heralded a more optimistic, forward-looking age as well as the arrival of the humanistic movement with its belief that if you treated people well you would get much better performance from them. It was during this period that the human potential movement got under way, along with the hippie movement and anti-Vietnam war protests. It was about rejecting establishment views and seeking new forms of "enlightenment". This came in the form of the Beatles and a fusion of eastern spirituality and alternative medicine, all of which would have a considerable impact on the fledgling coaching industry. On a more mundane level, in business circles the term counselling began to be slowly replaced with the term "executive coaching", yet much of what are considered as signs of early coaching still involved psychologists going in to talk to managers on a one-to-one basis to help them with work adjustment, or to help them become less abrasive in their dealings with others. But business coaching was beginning to branch out into many of the more holistic or positive things that it does today.

There was also a growing recognition that you cannot divorce work from personal life. Richard Boyatzis, a psychologist and an expert in organisational behaviour, says:

If a person says to me “I keep my work and my personal life separate”, I know that’s a form of pathology. We’ve known that since pre-Freud, when people compartmentalise, they actually segment their personality. In mild forms it’s dissociation. In major forms it’s called psychosis. It’s unhealthy.

The term counselling never sat easily in corporate life. Counselling was and still is associated with weakness and inadequacy. According to Bruce Peltier, a San Francisco-based clinical psychologist, the reason that executives have coaches rather than counsellors is that most would love to see themselves as “corporate athletes”, or at least high performers, but would balk at the idea of entering into therapy.

It is hardly surprising that during this era Tim Gallwey’s *Inner Game* series of books began to move out of the sporting world to make an even greater impact in the world of business. Gallwey’s driving idea was that the opponent, or rather the negative thoughts that resided in the human mind, was far more formidable than the one that faced you on the other side of the tennis court. According to Whitmore:

Gallwey was the first to demonstrate a simple and comprehensive method of coaching that could be readily applied to almost any situation.

A growing impact

By the late 1970s and early 1980s coaching was beginning to make a greater impact in corporate life. It was slowly being used as a device to help managers improve performance, rather than simply correct perceived deficiencies. In the UK it also began to be seen as a useful device for helping colleagues learn how to solve problems through guided discussion and activity.

It was about this time that management consultants began adopting many of the characteristics and techniques of coaching. There are some striking similarities between the two disciplines in that they both often address the same issues, although they involve different emphases and approaches. In general, the most common

form of coaching focuses on asking the right questions, and the most common form of consulting focuses on solving problems by coming up with the right answers.

On a more personal level, Weight Watchers was founded on self-help and group support principles. It was and still is a hugely successful worldwide organisation and one that has had many of its tactics emulated by group coaches.

The idea of personal development also began to spread to business life. Controversial new-age guru, Werner Erhard, who set up Erhard Seminars Training (EST), joined forces with Fernando Flores, a Chilean businessman and former senator, to establish the Forum training designed to appeal more widely to the corporate world. In 1984 Erhard formed a corporate business division, Transformational Technologies, which among other things promoted coaching from a consulting perspective.

By the end of the 1980s coaching had entered the business lexicon. But it was still not seen as a distinct discipline in its own right, rather an adjunct to other activities. Managers would be offered coaching for specific tasks.

Coming of age

All that was to change in the 1990s when the coaching phenomenon became firmly established as an important management development method for senior managers in major global corporations. It seems that sweeping technological change, globalisation and all the complexity and increased competitive pressures that they entailed produced a fertile environment in which coaching could flourish. So too did rising incomes.

Workplace coaching covered just about every business aspect:

- ▶ personal careers;
- ▶ transitions and change;
- ▶ mergers and start-ups;
- ▶ entrepreneurialism and leadership;
- ▶ groups and teams.

Coaching was no longer the exclusive domain of Fortune 500 company boardrooms; its services were being sought by enterprises of every size and type. Brock says:

It was about all those things and more. I think that the fascination with coaching stemmed from our yearning to replicate something that is missing from modern life. We are knowledgeable but not necessarily wise.

In other words, the pressures of growing complexity and intense competition, together with job insecurities, have made many people more fearful and anxious. This holds true especially in the higher echelons of corporate life, where coaching has found a rich client base. Life may be well-remunerated at the top, but to crudely paraphrase Thomas Hobbes, a 17th-century English philosopher, it is also nasty, brutish and short. The average tenure of a CEO in any of the FTSE 100 companies is currently around five years.

The style of top management in many companies militates against collegiality, with an unspoken taboo against admitting to any form of human vulnerability. Mark Goodridge of ER Consulting, a British firm specialising in organisation behaviour change, says:

Coaching needs to be seen in the light of that insecurity. How long do you hold on to your job? In the hire and fire modern corporate world, the coach is someone to watch over you and someone – importantly – who is not a colleague.

This view is echoed by Peter Block, an American business guru and author of several best-selling business books, including *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used* and *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest*:

I think the best business leaders – and certainly the ones I work with – know that corporate life is very tough on their people and genuinely want to do something about it.

In business, the 1990s also saw a proliferation of cross-discipline approaches and theories with many new leadership theories emerging and increasingly coaching was seen as the missing link to making such theories more of a reality. Christopher McKenna, author of *The World's Newest Profession: Management Consulting in the Twentieth Century*, says:

Neither academic scholars nor journalists worried about the professional credentials of consultants, but instead presumed that they responded to market forces like any other occupational group.

The same holds true for coaches, who continue to struggle for professional recognition in the same way as management consultants did before them. Part of that quest has given rise to more rigorous academic research, particularly in the area of business coaching and its impact on work performance. Twice as many articles about coaching were published between 2000 and 2004 than in the whole of the 1990s. Many of them appeared in psychology journals as well as management and training publications. Many of the new books about professional coaching showed clear links with earlier psychological underpinnings.

Many leading coaches are psychologists

Many of the world's leading coaches are psychologists by training, but according to Brock it would be wrong to assume that any company or individual seeking coaching should select only those suitably qualified in the discipline:

I think there's room for all in this field. A lot of US-based psychologists are moving into this area because they're finding that it's much more fun to work with healthy individuals, rather than those who are mentally unwell or depressed.

American psychologists are also discovering that by moving into coaching they can move out of the troubled American health-care system, thus avoiding battles with insurers for payment, and into the corporate world where it has been possible to earn a lucrative living – at least until the global financial crisis sparked by the credit crunch that began in 2007.

There are essentially three schools of western psychology:

- ▶ the post-Freud school that essentially dwells on developing mature emotions;
- ▶ the cognitive-behavioural school that focuses on how external

stimuli affect behaviours and how cognitive interventions can modify them;

- ▶ the humanistic-transpersonal school, with its more optimistic forward-leaning focus on the individual and self-advancement.

Coaching generally focuses on the last two schools, rejecting to a large degree the more pessimistic school of Freud with its emphasis on preordained behaviour.

Brock's research on the major influences behind coaching has led her to focus on those who shaped the coaching industry from many diverse disciplines, including sports and philosophy. But the two most dominant disciplines are psychology and business.

Psychologists who have influenced coaching

Alfred Adler

Born: 1879

Nationality: Austrian-American

Alfred Adler, Freud's erstwhile colleague, broke away from psychoanalysis to form his own independent school of psychotherapy and personality theory. He is also known for devising the concept of the "inferiority complex" as well as that of "feminism", of which he was strongly in favour. His main contribution to coaching is that he viewed individuals as always striving towards a goal, whereas Freud saw them as enslaved by their past. Essentially optimistic in outlook, he believed that people possessed the ability to devise their own solutions, which is the cornerstone of all coaching practice.

Chris Argyris

Born: 1923

Nationality: American

Chris Argyris, a psychologist, was one of the first to develop team-building sessions with senior executives and CEOs in the 1960s.

He focused much of his early research on exploring the impact of formal organisational structures, control systems and management on individuals. He later shifted his focus to organisational change, looking in particular at the behaviour of senior executives. His influence on coaching is seen as an indirect one in that he emphasised the discrepancy between what individuals say and what they do.

Richard Bandler

Born: 1950

Nationality: American

Richard Bandler, a psychotherapist, was a disciple of Fritz Perls (see page 18) and went on to co-found neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) with John Grinder, an associate professor of linguistics. NLP, a so-called science of the mind, has taken the world by storm over the past two decades. Bandler has been hailed as a genius by some but heavily criticised by others for inventing what they deem a “pseudoscience”. In 2006 the American Specialty Health Organisation (ASH), which has over 13m members and provides fitness and well-being programmes to individuals and companies, said that it was not aware of any valid published studies proving the scientific plausibility, diagnostic utility, or clinical efficacy of NLP. Bandler has also been mired in controversy, not least for his acrimonious split with Grinder in the 1980s and his private life; in 1988 he was tried but acquitted of the murder of a prostitute.

Nevertheless, the techniques he and Grinder developed have allowed individuals to shed, sometimes in minutes, phobias and bad memories that have plagued them through life. Only by detaching your mind from such fears can they be shed, he asserts. Further therapeutic techniques flowed from his work with hypnotist Milton Erickson (see page 15). Neuro refers to the nervous system and the mental pathways of the five senses; linguistic refers to language and its usage; and programming is borrowed from computer science. These three elements were combined to create a therapeutic technology that could manipulate people’s thoughts, emotions and deeds, which is why many people remain distrustful of NLP or of at least of its practice by those who are unprincipled.