

PRACTICAL ADVICE FROM CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF PERSONNEL AND DEVELOPMENT

Linking The Personal To The Professional

It is in the nature of coaching that the agenda is set by the individual being coached. It is, after all, a person-centered approach to learning, and that implies handing responsibility to the learner. But he or she may be unable to identify or articulate goals in the early stages of coaching. And when objectives do emerge, their focus can be on personal rather than work issues.

This is most likely to be the case where coaching is intended to produce fundamental change in the way an individual works and perhaps on the impact he or she has on an organisation – sometimes known as transformational coaching. Most coaches will recognise the dilemma posed when personal issues are raised. If coaching is to be used effectively, coaching interventions need to have clear organisational objectives, as well as objectives for the individual, usually agreed with the line manager beforehand. It can be difficult to show that coaching on personal issues leads to improved work performance. On the other hand, the real benefit to the organisation may only follow when the individual's personal development objectives are identified and met.

One way to get past this is to get away from thinking only of the tensions between individual and organisational objectives. Dr Peter Hawkins, chairman of the Bath Consultancy Group, offers this helpful perspective. "There are," he says, "always three clients in a coaching relationship: the individual, the client organisation and the relationship that transcends both – the individual in the organisation."

For the coach, this can offer a yardstick for judging how far to go in exploring personal issues and how to manage the development of objectives which balance the needs of the organisation and the individual. By its nature this will never be a perfect exercise. But coaches need to persist in helping those they coach to address the issues that concern them, while responding to the organisation's need to show that the money it has invested in coaching has been well spent.

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'**Reveal Magic Of Learning**' says Bill Bryson, author of several travel volumes, as well as the science book *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. 'To excite others, you must remember what drew you to your field in the first place.'

Classroom teaching can never be as magical as finding out for yourself at the point when you really want to learn, according to Bryson.

Bryson, admitted to delegates at the HRD 2007 event in London that he was a terrible student when he was growing up in the US, even in subjects that would later have proved useful. "I was very resistant to learning things when I was told to learn them – I wanted to learn on my own terms," Bryson said. "I remember sitting in the classroom on a summer's day and being taught

French, and thinking it was preposterous. I thought I could never possibly have any use for it. And yet two years later I was living in Europe.”

Bryson has made up for his attitude since, and describes going to libraries as his greatest indulgence. He also said research for his science book had shown that he had an “infinite capacity to be amazed.” Whatever field you work in, said Bryson, the important thing in teaching was to remain enthusiastic about it or you would have little chance of enthusing others. “If you want to excite other people, you have to remember the magic that drew you to your field in the first place,” he said. “Whatever you do, there must once have been a point when you decided you wanted to devote your life to it. The biggest mistake you can make in life is to get to the point where you don’t care about what you’re doing.”

Bill Bryson: **Issue date:** 03 May 2007, **Source:** People Management Magazine, Page: 9

Too Much Excitement

It's good to be enthusiastic about particular approaches to learning – but let's keep our passion in perspective.

Enthusiasm in our field can be a very positive emotion. People issues in organisations are important and getting enthusiastic about ways to address such issues can create positive energy for change. However, enthusiasm may need to be tempered with awareness of the big picture. In learning and development (L&D) activity, it’s especially important that enthusiasm for the latest trend does not give way to a one-dimensional approach.

In our work with organisations, we have emphasised that L&D professionals need to look at overall business strategies first and then consider learning approaches that fit both organisational and individual needs. For one client we identified 82 readily available learning and development modes, including those at work and away from work. Our role was to help them to determine what approaches best met specific individual and business needs.

No one seems to doubt two important factors in deciding on development approaches, namely that organisations vary in their needs and individuals vary in their learning preferences. Given this, the idea that there can be one right way to develop people in organisational contexts cannot be sustained.

This is where my concern for over-reaching enthusiasm comes in. There seems to be a danger that those who are highly committed to a particular approach, through their (usually) genuine passion for that approach, can over-sell. The best professionals, and consultants, recognise that their expertise in one or more areas may not be universally valid.

Let me take one example, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). I would argue that any L&D professional probably ought to know something about what NLP offers. However, for anyone to claim that NLP is the magic answer to all communication and interpersonal skills issues would be taking such enthusiasm too far. I am not in any way criticising the use of NLP – I was, after all, a director of a company that ran NLP training in Europe more than 25 years ago. What I am

concerned about is when a solution is over-used to address issues beyond its reach. And problems can get distorted to suit the solution being offered.

Sometimes my words of caution are interpreted as an attack on a particular approach. This may have happened in Myles Downey's recent column for PM (Learning centre, 22 March), where he ascribed to me views on coaching that bear no relation to what I actually think or do.

To reiterate a key point on coaching: it has its place but let's not assume that it should be seen as the dominant development mode – the silver bullet for all learning needs. My belief is that L&D professionals need to take a strategic overview when considering development needs and then use particular tactics, such as NLP or coaching or anything else that could meet particular business needs.

It may be worth bearing in mind that strategy and tactics, as concepts, stem from warfare. Strategy is associated with winning the war; tactics with winning battles. You can win battles but lose the war, so decisions driven by tactics alone are unwise. Coaching, training and NLP are tactics, not strategies. They need to be evaluated from a strategic position by L&D managers. And the enthusiasm of proponents of particular tactical modes may need to be properly considered by strategic-thinking professionals.

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'Help Staff Work Past Retirement'

Current employment models lack flexibility and are 'the result of ageism.'
A radical overhaul of employment and leadership models is needed to allow people to continue working past retirement age, according to a new report.

The report by Lord Andrew Turnbull, former head of the civil service and Cabinet secretary argues that current employment models, where workers retire at their most senior position and leave the organisation completely, lack flexibility and are a result of widespread ageism in the workplace. Leadership models also lack flexibility, with companies assuming they should continue to be led by their oldest employees.

The report, *The New Demographics: Reshaping the World of Work and Retirement*, calls for leadership models to be adjusted so that business management is transferred to younger staff. This would create advisory or client-facing roles that, with the implementation of flexible working practices, could help to retain older staff.

“We need to alter fundamentally our assumptions about work and retirement and the transition between the two,” Lord Turnbull said. “A profitable decade of mixed working and retirement ought to be the dominant model of how to make the most of our flexible years, easing ourselves into a restricted income rather than plunging into it.”

The report also calls for pension schemes to cut back on early retirement incentives and offer true actuarial value for deferment.

Build On Strengths To Inspire Change

'We talk about what's positive, what works and we build on it'.

Both public- and private-sector organisations – even the NHS – can benefit from examining their strengths rather than dwelling on their weaknesses, HR professionals from both sectors have shown.

Angie Gaspar and Ruth Dunlop of Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust explained how they used the appreciative inquiry (AI) approach developed by David Cooperrider to get testimonials from staff about how the trust worked best. “When you talk about change in the NHS you usually talk about what needs to be fixed, what’s going wrong – you’re diagnosing a problem and then trying to solve it,” said Gaspar, head of staff counselling and stress management at the trust. “With AI it is the opposite – we talk about what’s positive, what works and we build on it.”

The testimonials have been used in inductions and to establish a set of shared values for the trust. The stories had an energising effect on staff and were a powerful motivating tool, Gaspar said. David Gilmour, director of Castrol Marine, a division of BP, also used appreciative inquiry to make a real difference to his business. He started the process when he discovered that 25 per cent of the company’s invoices had mistakes in them. Instead of looking at each mistake, he sought to find out what was working in the successful 75 per cent of cases.

“I was looking to answer one question: how do we make life easy for ourselves and our customers? The key was to look for contracts that worked really well, and work out what the ideal contract would look like. That’s when you can identify what needs to change.” The result was a change programme that vastly simplified the pricing system. Invoice errors were reduced to 6 per cent and the average set-up time for a contract was reduced from three hours to 15 minutes.

Fun And Trust Engage Employees

'Our products are associated with fun, so why shouldn't that be the case for our work?' says Coca-Cola boss.

Encouraging a sense of fun and a feeling of trust are the two most important factors in engaging employees. Franchises operations in Eastern Europe, Russia, Ireland and Nigeria, and Farley said the idea of making work fun was a positive one that crossed national boundaries. “In many of the Eastern European countries we operate in, it’s a big thing for an employer to get involved in giving some enjoyment to workers and their families,” he said. “Our products are associated with fun, so why shouldn’t that be the case for our work?”

CCHBC’s recent survey of its 33,000 employees found that 79 per cent rated having “a fun place to work” as a key driver. Working for leaders they could trust also scored highly, with 54 per cent of staff citing this. The top driver was “challenging work”, at 92 per cent.

Future is Competition

The best swordsman in the world doesn't need to fear the second best swordsman in the world; no, the person for him to be afraid of is some ignorant antagonist who has never had a sword in his hand before; he doesn't do the thing he ought to do, and so the expert isn't prepared for him...'

Mark Twain

And so, like Mark Twain's 'swordsman', predicting where the next wave of competitive pressure will come from is increasingly difficult. We know about Globalisation and the speed of technological innovation, but have we really taken on board how they have changed the rules of the game forever? Today, when we compete for investment and talent, our rivals are just as likely to be in Bangalore as Ballina. And because our years of competing solely on cost are long behind us, it is essential that we significantly increase productivity by providing higher-value goods and services.

The winner in this new world of work will be the organisation – be it public or private – that has a clearly articulated vision of the future. Such an organisation requires people who are flexible, willing to change and can demonstrate the skills to make transformation a reality. Above all, it calls for inspirational leadership linked to innovative management structures. And this is where HR can play a major role: it is an unrivalled opportunity to add real value to the organisation. How you can add that value, in partnership with your line colleagues, is the core objective.

Michael McDonnell

Director, CIPD in Ireland