

the **HRDIRECTOR**

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the **HRDIRECTOR INTERVIEW:**

Alex Rickard - HR director, Towry Law

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Steve Walker – CEO, Tower Homes
3663

John Lewis
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Marsh Ltd.

M&S Money

West Yorkshire Police

Pictured: Alex Rickard
HR director, Towry Law

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DON'T MISS NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE WHERE WE LOOK AT: FORUM – THE GLOBAL WORKPLACE; PENSIONS; TRAINING; GRADUATE DEVELOPMENT; HR BUSINESS PARTNERS... AND MUCH, MUCH MORE

COACHING

TO COACH, OR NOT TO COACH? THAT IS THE QUESTION...OR IS IT?

There was a time, not that long ago, when the concept of coaching wasn't even on the agenda of most boardrooms. Things have changed since then and, although it is not present in every company or organisation across the country, coaching has become far more accepted, and even welcomed, across the gamut of industry sectors. However, whilst we may be moving away from the original question of whether or not coaching is a 'good thing to do', other questions are thrown up instead. Many embrace the concept of coaching, but not even all of those who provide it for their employees either understand its true value or even appreciate how you can – and can't – measure the results.

But what are the causes of this lack of understanding? What are the barriers that prevent coaching being as effective as it could be?

There are a number of misconceptions, including the belief that coaching is time-consuming and that it is 'yet another task to fit in' within an already busy schedule. However, effective coaching aims to bring about a change of behaviour and is not simply an assignment to be done and another box to be ticked.

Another, ongoing, argument is that coaching doesn't have a significant impact on the bottom line. Whilst the benefits of coaching may not be as easy to quantify as the introduction of new practical procedures, for example, those who coach and those who have been coached would argue instead that new ways of working and behaving have a very considerable effect on productivity and profit.

These are just two of the beliefs that some would say prevent coaching taking its rightful place in the development of employees at every level; they are not the only ones. We have spoken to three respected UK coaches to find out what they think are the key challenges within the coaching arena at the moment, and in the following pages and on the website you can read their insights.

However, we begin with a look at other countries and their attitudes to coaching, comparing and contrasting their experiences with each other and with the UK.

COACHING – AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

DR SABINE DEMBKOWSKI, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF THE COACHING CENTRE IN LONDON & COLOGNE, SUPPORTS BOARD MEMBERS, EXECUTIVES AND HIGH-POTENTIALS ACROSS EUROPE. SHE BELIEVES THAT THERE IS A CLEAR SHIFT SURROUNDING COACHING IN GERMANY AND OTHER COUNTRIES, AS IT IS INCREASINGLY PERCEIVED AS A CRUCIAL TOOL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH HIGH POTENTIALS AND EXECUTIVES, RATHER THAN MERELY FOR THE 'PROBLEM CASES'.

Decision makers in HR and learning and development have started to use their resources and budgets in a more strategic manner, with more and more organisations accepting that coaching is a valuable tool for developing their talent.

Increasingly, members of staff in junior and middle management positions are led by coaches in addition to their internal managers, and, in fact, recent estimates indicate that there are about 40,000 people in Germany alone who have been through a coaching programme. Whilst organisations make use of their trained resources to provide this internal coaching service, only those that are clearly identified as 'high-potentials' actually qualify to receive external coaching.

"goals are fixed in writing"

External coaches receive clear briefings about the time allowance for each client from the client's organisation. In the main this is in the range of 15 – 20 hours over a period of about six months. Anything above this needs to be requested by the coach to the client's manager. In addition, it is regarded as good practice to have a three-way conversation at the beginning of the coaching programme with the client, the client's manager and the coach, about the goals for the coaching programme. These goals are fixed in writing and in the middle and/or end of the programme, the goals are reviewed. The conversations are strictly confidential and organisations do not interfere, nor do they wish to receive any information about the content of the conversations.

The situations for coaching vary greatly but, more often than not, the start is marked by:

- the move into a new role
- the results of a 360 degree assessment process
- annual appraisal
- feedback from an external client.

On the other side of the globe in South Africa, coaching is also receiving much attention as it is perceived as a tool that will help organisations to reach 'international standards' and to develop their black and coloured executives that have recently been promoted to leadership positions. In fact, at the 6th Annual Conference for Mentoring and Coaching, we found that what is regarded as international best practice in Europe is also implemented with some of the leading organisations in South Africa.

In Eastern Europe, however, any type of coaching is still perceived as an exclusive service for the most senior positions. It is

regarded as a privilege and a status symbol to have a coach. I can recall an assignment in Zagreb where it was made clear to me that it is obligatory to accept the invitation for dinner after the coaching of the Board member. In the restaurant I was really surprised as I was shown around and introduced with great pride as *"My international coach"*.

THE PERCEIVED VALUE

Decision makers in HR and learning and development are increasingly under pressure to prove results and business benefits. Thus, the measure of the value of coaching is expected to be defined by the return on investment. In Germany this pressure is less apparent, and recently one of my contacts in Germany stated, *"We are not in the US, so for us it is a success if the feedback from colleagues indicated that his soft skills have improved, and that the client himself is positive about the coaching programme."* This appears to sum up the most widely spread opinion in the German speaking HR community.

However, in South Africa, as in other countries, the insistence on measurement is of great concern. This mirrors the general increase of such pressure in Europe as questionnaires and feedback processes after coaching programmes become more and more sophisticated. These processes always include quantitative measures that can form the basis for calculating the return on investment that people are now so keen to measure.



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