

CAN A COACH MAKE YOU CHANGE?

By Richard Bisiker.

Are you concerned about your performance as a partner running a practice? Then you are not alone; few partners are immune to the pressures of life as a leader! However, thanks to Executive Coaching it's a lot less lonely at the top!

No matter how successful we are, everyone suffers from a dip in confidence, a momentary loss of direction. Recognition of the value a Coach brings is growing. The Industrial Society quoted 40 % of leading UK employers used business coaching back in 1997 compared to 70% in 2000. Today, in the most recent CIPD *Training and Development 2005* survey, use of coaching was widespread in UK organisations, with almost nine out of ten reporting that they now use coaches in their organisation and 91% believe there is a direct link between investment in 'leadership development' and 'business performance'.

Worryingly, 31% of respondents said that they feel their leadership development activities are 'not very effective'. Running a practice of law, being a partner of a firm requires you to be a leader. If one of the most valuable tools in effective leadership development is coaching, how do Lawyers compare?

The Law Society of Scotland has no data on how many partners are using coaches, but imagines the trend is reversed, and that it is likely to be 1 in 10, and that's probably 100% more than five years ago!

Developing Leadership Skills

A leader cannot change others, he or she can only change their own behaviour and responses. From this their actions may then influence others (and indeed change a whole culture), but a Coach only works with you, helping you to develop your understanding of yourself, your skills, your values and how to communicate and implement systems that work for you and your practice.

Everyone accepts that leaders can make or break an organisation. It is the leader's personal beliefs that shape their actions and habits – and that translates into certain types of results; a chain reaction of 'cause and effect'. The personal skills and approach of a legal partner can, when put simply, be that of a 'business owner' running a practice of law, or a 'technician' being led by the demands of what passes the threshold!

Where did you learn your leadership skills? Probably like many other lawyers you were groomed by your senior partner/mentor, where did they learn their skills? From their senior partner and so on. It may not be so daring to say that the Loch

Ness Monster isn't the only dinosaur being sighted! Leadership skills need to be in the context of the current market place; a volatile and fast changing new environment.

The 'Market Place is Changing'

What with an ever increasing amount of new solicitors being admitted each year(see opposite), not to mention new private practice firms starting up, the pressure is very present. New rulings on how law should be practised, and higher demands can mean less time to deliver. Growing a practice can become side-tracked to just fulfil the 'technician' role of practicing law - instead of building a strong practice that supports you, and your quality of life.

New Role Admissions		
	2004	2003
Scotland	558	381
Eng&W.	7247	6924
Per year!		

Seminars Don't Work!

(BC) 'Before Coaching' there were seminars, but seminars, books, tapes and conferences don't *make* the difference. They only raise the level of awareness. It is only the implementation of ideas that will change your practice, and that implementation can be difficult. Ever noticed your enthusiasm being quickly doused when returning from a seminar to hard-core traditionalists, low expectations from others, or just disappointment when the ideas you fell in love with, no one else cares for? Coaching supports you as you implement changes. It is about real-time support, as events unfold.

What Is Coaching?

Coaching does not offer a panacea, nor will a coach *tell* you what to do. Coaching synthesizes the best from psychology, business, transformation, philosophy, finance and spirituality to benefit the Professional Executive, Business Owner, or Entrepreneur.

Who Works With A Coach?

Successful people who are striving for excellence, people who are facing or driving a change. These people realise that having a partner, champion, cheerleader, advocate and sounding board will bring out their best.

Why Does Coaching Work?

Coaching works because of three unique features:

- 1). SYNERGY. Client and coach become a team, focusing on the client's goals and needs and accomplishing more than the client would alone.
- 2). STRUCTURE. With a coach a client takes more actions, thinks bigger and gets the job done, using the accountability that the coach provides.
- 3). EXPERTISE. The coach knows how to help business people develop themselves to get the results they want; better decisions, make more money, set the best goals, and restructure their professional and personal lives for maximum productivity.

How Will The Coach Do This?

Coaching is delivered during regular, weekly sessions some face to face meetings, but as lives are busy, more often it is now by telephone. Clients bring

an agenda of items to the call. The coach helps the individual to stretch, learn and grow in order to create opportunities, solve problems and make the most of their strengths. When missing a distinction or principle, the coach draws one so you can see a clearer picture. When you are taking on a large goal, the coach helps you to design the project and provide the support and structure needed to make sure it gets done. The coach brings out your best, by offering alternatives, providing support, expecting a lot, and celebrating your success.

What To Look For In A Coach?

The right coach brings out your best, consistently. To do this, the coach you select should pass the following 3 tests:

1. Does this coach have a track record of helping others accomplish goals similar to what I want?
2. Do I feel enthused and motivated to act with this coach?
3. Will this coach keep up with, and ahead of me as I grow?

So if you are someone who occasionally experiences a sense of isolation and want to talk through practice development ideas without judgement; explore practice problems from objective 'third party' questions; review possible negative implications of solutions; be challenged; uncover weaknesses and learn about yourself - *privately*; get honest feedback and techniques on communication skills, hire a coach.

Richard Bisiker, Director of Personal Summits Ltd specialises in coaching Partners of Law firms and other 'professions'. He uses "Incisive Coaching" a technique of asking questions that cut through the surface matter into the deeper issue giving long lasting effects. This technique also creates much quicker results, often with zero-context, that means busy partners don't have to sit around in a meeting explaining all the background history to each issue. A coach should be provocative, but always respectful.

Personal Summits Ltd provides a 12-month coaching programme for partners. It begins with a 1-day workshop "Grow Your Practice" (which the Law Society of Scotland ran in Glasgow and Edinburgh recently). CPD points can be claimed as this goes towards your professional development.

This programme provides ready-to-use ideas. Paul McConville of McConville O'Neill Solicitors said "The workshop was not so much food for thought as a banquet of stimulating ideas". Archie Millar of Drever & Heddle Solicitors says, "The support coaching programme has helped me implement time management ideas that have created an extra 2 productive hours everyday whilst reducing the overall time I work!". Brian Inkster of Inksters Solicitors says, "I'm very busy and successful, but I haven't seen my desk for the files for years. Coaching with Richard actually moved me into action with systems that organise my environment consistently. I feel much more focussed as a result, and my clients get an even better service".

So a coaching question you may ask yourself... Who is really challenging you - lately?"

Personal Summits Ltd can be contacted on 01785 711102.