



Team Coaching: Dispensing with the me, myself and I

"There's no I in team" is a well-worn phrase, but in reality, many teams can struggle to find harmony. Personality clashes, differing agendas and aspirations can leave a team struggling to achieve. Annie Hayes looks at the role of coaching in developing high performance teams.

Team coaching not only enables the performance potential of a team to be fulfilled but also increases a team's capacity for self-sustaining development. Well that's the theory anyhow. And there has never been a more important time for teams to work effectively and efficiently to pull together and work through the downturn.

David Clutterbuck, co-founder of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, visiting professor at Sheffield Hallam University and leader of international consultancy, Clutterbuck Associates, knows a thing or two about coaching. He has helped hundreds of senior teams across the world address a whole host of difficult questions. Speaking at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) recent Coaching at Work Conference Clutterbuck told delegates that the first challenge is to decide whether a team is just that.

Is it a team?

"Team coaching is really complex far more so than individual coaching and the extent of the unknown is enormous."

Professor David Clutterbuck, co-founder of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council.

"If you make the assumption that a team is indeed a team you will fail the first challenge." So what's the answer? Clutterbuck says there are several indicators, firstly shared purpose and goals and whether a group accepts and offers support to one another.

Yet it's not always as clear cut as Clare Allen, a senior business coach for Tax and People Services at KPMG explains: "At KPMG we use the word 'team' all over the place, it's used prolifically to describe people in cross-functional groups and year-groups etc. I had a team that was really a group based at the same location – whilst they were all partners they were really quite an eclectic bunch. We looked at what the common purpose was and found initially that they didn't have one." After some coaching the group focused on its goals and discovered some shared objectives including winning work in the market, sharing knowledge and providing each other with personal support. These all became reasons for the group to come together and truly form a 'team'.

What sort of team is it?

The next challenge is identifying what type of team it is. Clutterbuck points to several examples: "In 'cabin crew teams' the membership is different every time whilst the task remains the same. This is the case on a plane or in an operating theatre. The problem here is that you don't get to know anyone well enough to develop a relationship. In project teams you get great sudden bursts of knowledge but then you lose it. Matrix teams may come together later in a process and therefore there is less understanding whereas in virtual teams you're not sure who the membership is." The combinations are seemingly endless but a common goal for all team coaches is to turn their teams into a high-performing one.

Allen says that to have a high-performing team you need to have: "Six to eight people, mutually agreed goals and purpose and agreed ways of working and accountability. Achieving a star performance isn't easy, however, and there are several challenges to be addressed along the way.

Challenges of team coaching:

"As an internal coach the key challenges are managing interpersonal dynamics and conflict in that moment and in that environment, figuring out at what point in the team's life cycle you begin the coaching relationship, developing the competence, capability and credibility of the coach, managing the team's expectations of the coach and measuring the impact of team coaching."

Sara Hope, senior business coach for Advisory Services at KPMG.

Sara Hope, senior business coach for Advisory Services at KPMG says: "As an internal coach the key challenges are managing interpersonal dynamics and conflict in that moment and in that environment, figuring out at what point in the team's life cycle you begin the coaching relationship, developing the competence, capability and credibility of the coach, managing the team's expectations of the coach and measuring the impact of team coaching."

And managing expectations can be a real issue. Clutterbuck says there's a lack of clarity about what team coaching and team facilitation is: "If you know the outcome, it's facilitation, if you don't know it it's usually coaching."

Hope has her own formula: "To manage the team expectations of a coach I explore the word 'coach' and I work with leaders to clarify their expectations." Allen draws upon her experience of working in tax with a leadership team in which the key players wanted to develop an 'away team': "What they meant was a two hour meeting – what I introduced to them was the core of team development the investment in looking inwardly at themselves."

Unlike many businesses the coaches at KPMG are assigned full-time to the task and the business has given its focus predominantly to team coaching. From Hope's experience the challenge is to make step changes. She found that she was working with a group of very bright and capable people who wanted to, "Identify themselves as a high performing team. Once we had a shared vision it was about how we managed different sub-groups in that team and built strengths whilst managing conflict."

Preventing 'group think':

Managing different backgrounds, levels of seniority and positions of interest is a further challenge. Clutterbuck says the trick is making 'constructive use' of diversity and conflict in equal measure. "All teams have some conflict but how can you make sure it's positive, how do you shift people towards positive conflict?" And how do you ensure that 'groupthink' doesn't take over – that is when the participants are so heavily indebted to reaching consensus and being affable with one another that they rush into a poor decision.

A crucial step is treating conflict as an essential part of the outcome. Allen admits it can be tough if the culture is not shaped to see it as a positive: "In my experience at KPMG our values are people-centric so to be seen as competing with someone else is seen as a negative." Leaders have their part to play and can help quash groupthink by withholding their opinions until the team has deliberated, getting different subgroups to explore the same problems can also help.

A spokesperson from the Fire-Service says that part of the problem in his organisation is getting senior-level people to open up. Without honest dialogue 'group think' is likely to occur. Hope says it can be overcome as long as a level of trust is established: "You've got to create enough trust so the issues are brought onto the table, there is an opportunity for them to address that themselves." Whilst Allen says: "It's getting across from the start that it's a safe environment." For Clutterbuck

part of the issue can be addressed by looking at what the team is not talking about.

Can the line manager be an effective coach to his or her own team?

"Team coaching is really complex far more so than individual coaching and the extent of the unknown is enormous. There are very few people that train to be team supervisors which leaves a big hole," says Clutterbuck. At the individual level it is fairly common for line manager to play coach and whilst the importance of supervision in developing and maintaining the quality and professionalism of coaching has been increasingly recognised within this field it still remains an area of uncertainty for many coaches. At team level the quality checks are almost non-existent and it is an area that needs further development to both raise competency levels and expectations of coaches.

Team coaching should always aim to add value. Organisations such as KPMG have recognised the enormous benefits it can bring in helping drive the business forward to reach its goals – so much so that it has invested heavily in full-time coaches. Yet they're a rare breed and many teams are left floundering, stuck in the doldrums of groupthink and a directionless existence. Managed appropriately team coaching can really be the 'fairy godmother' that turns fortunes around for a team, and that is certainly something worth wishing for in the current economic climate.

TrainingZONE 08-Dec-08

Categories: [Coaching and Mentoring](#)

Copyright © 2002 TrainingZONE Ltd. All rights reserved