

Course

Coaching

Course provider Penna Consulting
(020 7460 5400)

Price on application

Coaching is a loaded word. Although coaching is perhaps mainly still associated with sport, a cultural revolution (and I use the term loosely) has taken hold creating a population aspiring to a celebrity “lifestyle”, which means that it has also become burdened with all sorts of alarming images around the notion of life coaching. Carole Caplin never fails to spring to mind in this context.

Even when the term is thrown around in a business environment, there is usually a contingent who will smirk at the idea of it, dismissing it as the worst kind of American faddishness.

Before embarking on a coaching taster course, I admit that I had a distorted view of the subject. But what really tipped the scale was my assumption that coaching would be similar to traditional classroom training. Because my experience of that has, unfortunately, not been altogether positive, I was nervous that all the difficulties and drawbacks I have experienced with classroom training would apply again.

Carole Caplin never fails to spring to mind in the context of life coaching

I had four taster sessions. The first one, which was described as a “biographical interview”, was used to explore my background, my perceived strengths and weaknesses, and to agree on objectives for the rest of the session. I also completed a learning-style questionnaire.

The same content could have been covered – perhaps to a lesser extent – on a run-of-the-mill one-day course in a classroom. Certainly, I have completed such questionnaires many times. So what was the difference this time? The striking distinction was who was leading the agenda: me.

Although I was not consciously aware of it at the time, I was controlling the direction of conversation. I did most of the talking and the coach did most of the listening. The power of such a dynamic is hugely underestimated. I realised how rare it is to be in a situation where the conversation is not mutual but centres on you alone. More importantly, there is enough time for you to evaluate and resolve your concerns.

At the end of the first session we were able to identify and agree the themes for the other sessions. These included a look at my leadership style and my “internal processes” – for example, what triggers panic, frustration or upset in me – and what interventions can be put in place to combat those reactions and to cope with conflict.

The structure was tailored to my needs, so it would be pointless to expand on the issues we explored. But the methods we used to solve problems ranged from the practical – for instance, role play or discussion – to more theory-based approaches – for example, explaining reactions using psychological models and leaning how to break patterns.

The techniques we used were ones I felt comfortable with. This was crucial to my development and it was what ensured that the course was so valuable. One of the advantages of the one-to-one scenarios is that it is much less inhibiting, encouraging a greater degree of honesty about how you are being asked to progress. But this again harks back to the question of whose agenda you are following. Coaching does allow you to work to your own agenda rather than that of the trainer or even a fellow delegate on a course.

I found that there are certain provisos with coaching. Like most things, you will get out of it what you put into it. I worked hard during the sessions and they demanded a degree of self-analysis and self-exploration that I was not used to. In many ways it really was similar to having a “counsellor,” but for work issues rather than person problems.

You cannot sit there waiting for someone to pour answers into your head. If that were the case, it would not be coaching at all. Success will depend on the willingness of both coach and coachee, but I do wonder how much success also depends on the idiosyncrasies of the relationship between the two parties.

My coach was knowledgeable about her subject without spouting jargon or overwhelming me with theory. She was logical, empathic and, most importantly, she had a sense of humour. Her enthusiastic personality led me to participate in exercises I would normally have felt rather reticent about.

At the end of the sessions I was rewarded with a genuine renewal of confidence in my abilities. My strengths were improved on and my weaknesses were identified and tackled. I found myself addressing a number of problems that I had previously shied away from – both inside and out of the workplace – simply because I believed I was more competent.

I would certainly consider coaching again.

Rima Manocha attended a free coaching taster course, courtesy of Penna Consulting.

Rima Manocha

Deputy editor

People Management