Winning Business Digest Insight, tips and ideas on how to win more high value work

6 'must do's' to maximise results from your BD coaching programme

Today's coaching programmes aren't always built around the traditional one-to-one format. Increasingly a greater return on investment is gained from using coaching to support small groups of fee-earners to win more work.

Despite the difficult economic climate, the last few years have seen a significant rise in the use of coaching in the professional services, as a tool to improve the performance of professionals.

This demonstrates that, even when resources are scarce, firms are gaining real value from this area of learning support.

But what are the key ingredients of success in a BD coaching programme? We think there are 6 'must do's' that apply to business development coaching in particular.

1 Be clear on what you are trying to achieve from Day 1

It's difficult to demonstrate the success of a programme if the anticipated results are too vague. For example, are you looking to improve revenue growth through sales skills coaching or client satisfaction through client relationship coaching? Or are you looking to prompt a cultural shift by creating a client-centric culture through coaching? Whatever your objectives (and they may be a combination of the above), it is important to articulate them clearly right from the start. It will be hard for participants to grasp fully what is required of them if those 'sponsoring' and leading the programme are not able to do so. It will also make it hard to assess how successful the sessions have been.

Maximising results tip: *Regularly review the outputs of the programme against your original intention. It can be easy to lose sight of the initial goal. At the same time be flexible, as you may need to tweak some of the objectives or fine-tune the coaching approach along the way to reflect new situations for the business and the individuals involved.*

2 Make sure ALL participants are clear on the context, purpose and expectations of coaching

Organise a three way goal setting session between the coach, individual and sponsor. A 'contracting' meeting like this is a good opportunity to gain an insight into the purpose of the intended coaching, to manage expectations of all the stakeholders, and to challenge when 'agendas' are not explicit enough.

Maximising results tip: *Ensure all the stakeholders are in broad agreement on the coaching outputs, so that the coaching partnership or 'contract' has the best chance to be effective. Coupled with this is the need for personal and group accountability to motivate each of the individuals involved to do what they have committed to do.*

3 Match the coach to the individual with care

The coaching relationship can make all the difference to the results achieved. As with any professional relationship, good rapport and trust are essential. Think carefully about the type of coach you are looking for. For instance, are you looking for one that is directive and challenging (in a positive way) or one that takes a more gentle and supportive approach?

A good coach will, of course, be able to flex between styles, but the contracting meeting is a great time to explore the style of coaching that best matches your firm. Assess the coach's suitability in terms of rapport and chemistry 'fit' as well as getting the results you want.

Maximising results tip: *Choose a coach who you are confident can flex their style accordingly and will have real credibility with the individual to be coached. This is particularly true at partner level. The coach has to earn the right to provide advice and guidance that the partner can trust and rely on. A coaching qualification is a starting point but the coach's experience and credibility also needs to be without question.*

Always assess a coach's suitability in terms of rapport and chemistry 'fit' with your firm, as well as their track-record to deliver the results you want.

As the coaching progresses, its success should be demonstratively clear to the individual, the coaching sponsor and the coach.

4 Be explicit in how you will measure the programme's success

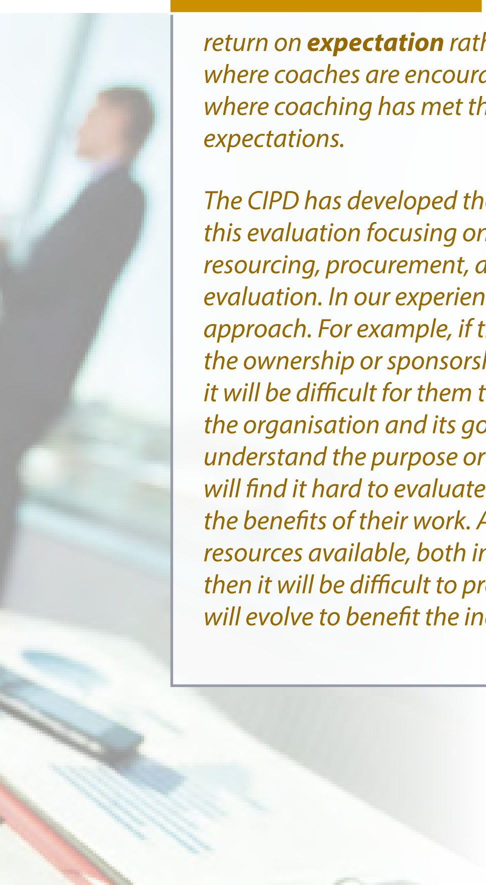
Measuring the success of coaching will probably involve a blend of quantitative measures and qualitative measures.

- **Quantitative measures** need to be specific and have a timeframe – for example increasing revenue from existing clients by 10% over the next 12 months, or making 3 new contacts a month for the next 6 months.
- **Qualitative measures** are less easy to assess numerically but just as important. If the objective is to improve client relationship skills then feedback from a sample of clients working with the individual would be valuable. If it's leadership skills that are being developed then gain 360 feedback from an appropriate mix of colleagues.

As the coaching progresses, its success should be demonstratively clear to the individual, the coaching sponsor and the coach. If the coaching doesn't appear to be achieving the expected results then a meeting to assess progress, to re-evaluate the original objectives and to discuss the 'get back on course' next steps should be organised as soon as possible.

Maximising results tip: *There is a trend towards looking at return on* ***expectation*** *rather than on* ***investment*** *– where coaches are encouraged to clearly articulate where coaching has met the organisation's expectations.*

The CIPD has developed the OPRA model to assist this evaluation focusing on ownership, positioning, resourcing, procurement, assessment and evaluation. In our experience this is a good robust approach. For example, if the coach is not clear on the ownership or sponsorship of the coaching then it will be difficult for them to grasp a clear view of the organisation and its goals. If the coach doesn't understand the purpose or positioning then they will find it hard to evaluate the results or articulate the benefits of their work. And if they don't know the resources available, both internally and externally, then it will be difficult to predict how the coaching will evolve to benefit the individual and also the firm.



5 Leverage the skills of the BD, HR, finance and other key functions in the business

Firms who have the skills of a good Business Development and Human Resource team should naturally involve these teams in the planning, execution and evaluation of the coaching programme. In this way the skills acquired from the coaching providers can be cascaded throughout the organisation. At the same time those being coached can approach specialists within the firm for further practical help and advice.

Maximising results tip: *Encourage peer support or coaching between individuals involved in the programme and draw on the support and guidance of experienced professionals within the firm. Organise peer coaching so that professionals can practice the approaches learned in 'live' BD situations. Also create BD development plans for the professionals involved, based on the learning from the programme, and integrate these into your overall appraisal systems.*

6 Think beyond the traditional one-to-one approach

Today's coaching programmes aren't always built around the traditional one-to-one format. Increasingly a greater return on investment is gained from using coaching to support small groups of partners from the same practice area or sector. It is being used to support teams working on a specific client (or target client), or other teams of partners and associates who wish to work together to achieve their client relationship and revenue goals.

Maximising results tip: *Explore whether your firm could gain some economies of scale from its coaching approach and at the same time secure a greater return on investment. Consider which professionals would benefit from being part of a small group which receives coaching. Sometimes working alongside two or three colleagues can really enhance the learning experience and bring about even more positive outcomes for the individuals concerned and firm as a whole.*

Summary

The tips we have covered here come from our many years' experience of coaching individuals and small groups of professionals to improve their business development activities to generate high value work. The tips frequently are at the heart of both the professionals and their sponsoring firms experiencing a positive outcome with tangible results.

The more specific the coaching's focus is, for example:

- Building a practice.
- Leading a team to focus on business development.
- BD campaign planning.
- Managing difficult/complex client relationships.
- Making an impact as a lateral hire.
- Becoming the 'go-to' professional in your field.
- Starting in a new geography/sector.
- Targeting new business opportunities.
- Creating revenue generating plans.
- Passing the partnership promotional panel.
- Pitch presentation coaching.

… the more easy it is to measure the outputs and changes in behavior when the coachee returns to the office.

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