

## **Want to go beyond your comfort zone? It starts with setting compelling goals that excite and challenge you**

One of the early things we do when organising a new coaching programme for a leader is to have an open discussion with the leader and their sponsors about their expectations from the coaching. The purpose of this contracting stage is to go more precisely into what the leader and the sponsors are looking for from the coaching, what the coachee wants to achieve and why, what's the value for the organisation. Then there is the question how this achievement will be noticeable and how the sponsors can support the learning process in partnership with the coachee and coach.

### **Can't wait to get started?**

This is an exciting moment to come together and create something exciting and challenging for the coachee to step into in which we are all aligned – the leader (coachee), the sponsor (CEO or team leader) and myself (coach).

### **Align expectations as a foundation for success**

Another important element of this discussion is to clarify expectations around reporting during the coaching process and agree workable rules. What does the sponsor need, if anything? A friendly check-in from time to time from the coachee to let the sponsor know how they are finding the coaching, what they are learning? Normally the content of discussions taking place in the coaching sessions is strictly confidential between the coachee and coach. It needs to be this way, so the coachee can be sure of having a completely safe space in which to explore their development including areas where they feel vulnerable.

### **Capture insights into team working practices**

However, without revealing details from the discussions, it can be helpful for the coach to be able to talk to the sponsor if anything arises that indicates any current practices in the team are unwittingly causing problems and getting in the way of desired performance. The coachee may have a new perspective on what could really make a difference. In this arena the sponsor could have a helpful role by being made aware of such contextual matters and be in a position to reflect and work with the team to fine tune and make changes.

### **What's the added impact you're looking to make?**

When it comes to identifying the goals it is useful to have a big overarching sense of how the leader wants to advance their development and what they want to reach, including their growth as a person, within which more specific and measurable goals naturally fit. Coachees and sponsors have an opportunity in this facilitated discussion to experience alignment and to have confidence that the goals chosen really speak to what is important for the organisation, the impact of the leader's role and the value to the individual of accomplishing those things. And also what it will take to accomplish them.

This means asking yourself things about the goals you've chosen, questions like:

- What excites you about accomplishing those goals?
- What's their value to you?
- What's their value to the organisation?
- What will it take from you to reach them?
- What could get in your way?
- What concerns do you have?
- What are your most important success criteria? (i.e. how will you/others know if you've succeeded?)
- What support could be helpful from your stakeholders?

### **Stand in the future**

Taking this further, as we tune into the chosen goals more closely, I ask questions to get the coachee to imagine they are already looking back after finishing the coaching process. They've accomplished big shifts in those areas that are important to them. What can they now see? What has opened up for them? How does life look now compared to before starting on the coaching journey?

### **Compelling future is powerful**

Why do I do this? To help make the desired future more compelling and real. To transform how far the coachee sees they can go. To have them empowered to step outside their comfort zone. This is what enables coaching to be transformational and deliver far more value than business as usual.

As I remind leaders who work with me, "there is no stretch in the comfort zone and there is no comfort in the stretch zone"!

Sometimes when we set goals, we are excited at the time and then a few days later find that we are not as motivated as we were. By imagining we have accomplished our goals, standing in the future and visualising our success, the value to us and our organisation and so on, it provides that much needed energy at times when we feel less motivated, on those days when we struggle to see clearly.

### **In vulnerability lies strength**

And another useful thing to look at during this first meeting is to have the coachee consider what could get in their way of reaching their goals, what concerns or fears may be there. Being able to accept our vulnerability and admit our concerns about achieving challenging things is so important in helping us face those, realise we are human just like anyone and that it is normal to face doubts. Getting this out on the table rather than avoiding or hiding from the fear we may experience, is one of the things that helps us own and manage our fear – rather than it owning and managing us.



If this helpsheet speaks to you and you want to look at how to optimise your own in-house processes for staff development and goal setting, please reach out for a call.

I provide one to one and team coaching for leaders and their organisations. If something particular resonates in what I've outlined here and you would like to check out what support options could be helpful for you and your team, please get in touch.