

South East Sector Improvement Programme

Evaluation of the Coaching to Improve Performance Course

1. The coaching course

1.1 The course consists of 2 days (with a gap between the days) of formal workshop type learning delivered in house in local authorities across the south east. The course tutors were Dianne Smith and Anna Wright. Some pre course work activity to assess personal style, values and skills is included.

1.2 The objectives of the course are

- To understand what coaching is
- To understand own values and personal style and see how it might differ from others
- To be able to use the GROW model as a framework for coaching
- To be able to use coaching to improve performance using selected tools
- To understand the value of reflection and use a tool to facilitate this

1.3 The definition of coaching used in the course is 'a formal one to one relationship 'in which the coachee and coach collaborate to assess and understand the coachee and his or her leadership developmental tasks, to challenge current constraints while exploring new possibilities, and to ensure accountability and support for reaching goals and sustain development'.¹

1.4 The course recognises that coaching normally excludes direct advice giving and is based on contracted, solution-focused discussions on a topic of the coachee's choosing.

1.5 The content of the course include

- Definitions of coaching
- Empirical evidence for the effectiveness of coaching
- The importance of values in coaching
- The GROW model of coaching
- Models of personal change and motivation
- Reflective practice

1.6 The teaching methods employed on the course include presentations, small group or pairs discussions, videos of coaching, simulated coaching practice and

¹ Ting, S and Hart, E (2004) Formal Coaching in McCauley, C and Van Velsor, E (eds) *The Centre for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development* San Francisco: John Wiley and Son.

completion of pre-set tasks. Homework between the two workshop days involved practising coaching on a colleague.

2. Delivered to whom and when

2.1 The course was delivered for the following authorities and delegate numbers as follows:

| Authority | Dates |
|------------|---|
| Kent | 14 th Nov 14 and 4 th Dec 14 |
| Portsmouth | 12 th and 19 th Nov 14 |
| RBWM | 22 nd and 29 th Jan 15 |
| Bucks | 14 th and 21 st May 15 |
| Slough | 6 th and 13 th Feb 15 |
| S'ton | No dates provided |
| BF | 3 rd and 10 th Dec 14 |
| Surrey | 28 th Nov and 5 th Dec 14 |

| Authority | Delegates |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Kent | 43 |
| Portsmouth | 18 |
| RB Windsor and Maidenhead | 31 |
| Buckinghamshire | 4 |
| Slough | 23 |
| Southampton | 4 |
| Bracknell Forest | 21 |
| Surrey | 35 |
| East Sussex | 26 |
| Hants | 5 |
| West Sussex | 8 |
| Milton Keynes | 1 |
| West Berks | 2 |
| Total | 221 |

3. Immediate post course evaluation ratings by participants and course leaders

3.1 Each course was highly rated by the course leaders. From their point of view the lessons which were intended to be learned from each course clearly appeared to have had a positive impact on the delegates. The following comments were made by the course leaders for each of the courses listed above, together with quantitative and typical qualitative comments by participants.

3.1.1 Kent 14th November 2014 and 4th December 2014

This group of participants were all managers in the Kent Early Years and Childcare service. They were an enthusiastic and committed group whose level of questioning displayed their keenness to understand how coaching could be integrated into their line management roles. They were very keen to develop and practice their skills. They all completed homework by practising coaching with positive results. By the end of the course they were skilled in using the GROW model having practiced it 5 times, which includes the homework task, and observed it 3 times and been coached 4 times. Between Day 1 and Day 2 the senior team had met and using a visioning tool had developed a strategy for embedding coaching across the team which was shared and discussed with the group in the final session.

| Questions | Response |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Did the session meet its stated objectives? | 100% |
| Usefulness to you within your role | 100% <i>outstanding or good</i> |
| Potential Impact on future working practices | 100% <i>outstanding or good</i> |

What difference did participants feel this course will make to children and young people?

- Has potential to make as immense difference to the team /sector – excited!
- Will benefit from a better skilled workforce
- Coaching will improve the performance of the team
- Potential to improve outcomes and build capacity with providers and team for continuous improvement

Participants said they would take forward what they had learned in the following ways:

- Use coaching strategies to become an ‘unconscious’ coach in the workplace and settings
- Build capacity within the team
- Develop ‘core’ questions and practice, introduce performance wheel in appraisals, develop listening skills, use performance equation
- Initially coaching a needy team member

Suggestions on how the senior team could help you implement coaching

- Build into organizational ethos
- Provide training for the whole team
- Value the 'coaching model' and lead by example

Comments made by participants on the particular strengths of the session include the following:

- Practice of coaching styles /handouts
- Tutors' knowledge excellent, pace good, working together in practice sessions good
- A good mix of methods to keep pace with up to date research and information

Suggested areas for improvement

- Would have been good to know we needed to bring examples to share
- Motivational questions – would have liked additional time to read through to digest
- Further opportunities for practice and asking questions and sharing experiences

3.1.2 Portsmouth 12th and 19th November 2014

This group of participants represented a cross section of the Commissioning Children's services managers. They were an enthusiastic and highly motivated group, very keen to develop and practice their skills. The majority completed homework in practicing coaching with positive results. By the end of the course they were skilled in using the GROW model having practiced it 4 times and observed it 3 times and been coached 4 times.

| Questions | Response |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Did the session meet its stated objectives? | <i>100%</i> |
| Usefulness to you within your role | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |
| Potential Impact on future working practices | <i>95% outstanding or good</i> |

What difference did participants feel this course will make to children and young people?

- Hopefully in better commissioning of services
- More effective practitioners in positions that influence service development
- Will improve outcomes if applied across the system
- Staff will be more empowered and equipped to be more effective in their roles which will have a positive impact on the commissioning of services

Participants said they would take forward what they had learned in the following ways:

- Embed across the service ,1;1s, ad hoc requests , use the variety of tools in a wide range of situations
- Embed within the team
- Use techniques in practice and reflect
- Incorporate in monthly supervision
-

Suggestions on how the senior team could help you implement coaching

- All Authority approach to make more effective

Comments made by participants on the particular strengths of the session include the following:

- Opportunities to practice
- Well structured, allowed enough time for practice , good range of tools offered
- Ensuring everyone involved in the feedback
- Achieved the aim in definitely delivering coaching that can be used in my role

Suggested areas for improvement

- More preparation time in advance of the session
- HOS attendance throughout though appreciate the difficulty of this
- Alternatives for those who do not like role play

3.1.3 RBWM 22nd and 29th January 2015

This group of participants represented a cross section of managers across Children’s Services directorates. They were an enthusiastic and highly motivated group, very keen to develop and practice their skills. The majority completed homework in practicing coaching with positive results. By the end of the course they were skilled in using the GROW model having practiced it 4 times and observed it 3 times and been coached 4 times.

| Questions | Response |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Did the session meet its stated objectives? | <i>100%</i> |
| Usefulness to you within your role | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |
| Potential Impact on future working practices | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |

What difference did participants feel this course will make to children and young people?

- Enable a solution focused service
- Will be able to deliver outcomes , greater performance which will have a knock on effect to children and young people
- Will make me think about how I work directly with YP and families
- More effective interventions due to confidence building in staff.

Participants said they would take forward what they had learned in the following ways:

- Being part of supervision sessions
- Incorporate into my team learning
- I intend to use all the coaching skills on a day to day basis, 1:1s and team meetings
-

Suggestions on how the senior team could help you implement coaching

- Genuine commitment
- Undertake the 'Train the Trainer' training
- Senior management to be trained on coaching to promote a top down approach

Comments made by participants on the particular strengths of the session include the following:

- Time and space to practise skills
- Gave lots of tools, examples and various methods to be able to use coaching in day to day work and solve problems
- Knowledge and experience of trainers

Suggested areas for improvement

- More discussion /examples of how to integrate the coaching model into the very outcome/output/results driven cycle of appraisals/supervision
- Information from the organization at the beginning of the first session

3.1.4 Buckinghamshire 14th and 21st May 2015

This was the first of three cohorts of children's' social care managers to undertake this two day programme. This significant level of participation signals the Directorate's strong commitment to embed coaching across Children's services. They were an enthusiastic and friendly group, very keen to develop and practice their skills. The majority completed homework in practicing coaching with positive results. By the end of the course they were skilled in using the GROW model having practiced it 4 times and observed it 3 times and been coached 4 times.

| Questions | Response |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Did the session meet its stated objectives? | <i>100%</i> |
| Usefulness to you within your role | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |
| Potential Impact on future working practices | <i>95% outstanding or good</i> |

What difference did participants feel this course will make to children and young people?

- Better outcomes will be achieved if staff are better empowered and valued through coaching
- Stability of staff- improved job satisfaction means staff will stay longer in Bucks which will benefit our young people and families

- Can be used directly with families , children and young people to empower them to resolve their own issues to gain second order change .
- Empowered line managers are more able to empower workers who are then more able to effect positive change in families
-

Participants said they would take forward what they had learned in the following ways:

- In informal and formal supervisions and in coaching sessions with colleagues
- Use GROW in informal supervision and unit meetings
- Start with peer coaching and then offer coaching to supervisors not being directive – challenge self
-

Suggestions on how the senior team could help you implement coaching

- Cascade across the service as a positive tool to empower staff in problem resolution
- TIME- important for successful implementation of coaching and balance of time coaching/supervision/case management discussions in unit meetings – something has to be reconfigured to include in our working environment
- SMT to lead by example and commit to a full and thorough introduction and maintenance of a coaching pool

Comments made by participants on the particular strengths of the session include the following:

- Trainers were easy to listen to and engaging
- Fits with systemic practice
- Overall motivation and positivity by facilitators
- GROW model and motivational interviewing

Suggested areas for improvement

- Perhaps less time with colleagues practicing although important
- Watching experienced coaches doing it
- Would spreading the course out help with in depth practice – e.g. 4 weeks?

3.1.5 Slough 6th and 13th February

This group of participants represented a cross section of the key managers across Children’s services directorates including all members of the Senior Management team. This exceptional level of participation signals the Directorate’s strong commitment to embed coaching across Children’s services. They were an enthusiastic and highly motivated group, very keen to develop and practice their skills. The majority completed homework in practicing coaching with positive results. By the end of the course they were skilled in using the GROW model having practiced it 4 times and observed it 3 times and been coached 4 times.

| Questions | Response |
|---|----------|
| Did the session meet its stated objectives? | 100% |

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Usefulness to you within your role | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |
| Potential Impact on future working practices | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |

What difference did participants feel this course will make to children and young people?

- Improve conversations with staff, children young people and families to help improve standards and practice
- Developing a solution focused approach to dealing with issues based on recognizing strengths
- If social workers are motivated and signed up to making a difference this can work in their 1:1 sessions with children –can elicit their wishes and feelings
- Staff feel listened to

Participants said they would take forward what they had learned in the following ways:

- Tackling thorny issues particularly with managers
- Using tools, away day team meetings ,service plans, peer group meetings
- Explain what coaching is to the team and use it in 1:1s

Suggestions on how the senior team could help you implement coaching

- To see the senior managers proactively practice coaching techniques
- Leading by example
- Embed as a culture throughout the organization- all policies and JDs recognize/reflect coaching
- Invest in the coaching programme

Comments made by participants on the particular strengths of the session include the following:

- Good presentation and some useful tools can easily implement
- Role playing , having the opportunity to coach with my colleagues
- Trainers were approachable and reflective

Suggested areas for improvement

- Films
- AV – including volume
- Shorter length of practice sessions however note this is an individual view
- Able to link up all the key features more precisely ie from first homework to council objectives

3.1.6 Southampton No dates

By the end of the course they were skilled in using the GROW model having practiced it 4 times and observed it 3 times and been coached 4 times.

| Questions | Response |
|---|-------------|
| Did the session meet its stated objectives? | <i>100%</i> |

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Usefulness to you within your role | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |
| Potential Impact on future working practices | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |

Particular strengths of session

- Nearly all delegates commented on the benefit of the practical coaching sessions to use the skills they were learning.
- Practicing coaching in a safe environment.
- The use of different medias.
- Ease of grasp and strategies for implementation.
- Blend of knowledge and experience.

What difference will this make to children and young people?

- Empowering staff.
- To empower children and young people so they feel more included in intervention sessions.
- Use to strengthen the families model that is already used in CP conferences.
- Improving own performance as a team leader
- Valuing staff and improving staff retention

How do you intend to take forward what you have learnt?

- Embed within the team to improve team competences.
- Using the performance wheel for appraisals
- Use the ethos of coaching to have feedback conversations with social workers post CP conferences
-

Have you any suggestions how the senior team could help you implement coaching?

- We would like senior managers to be committed to the process
- Interested in why they are interested in it now
- How to roll it out to other managers

3.1.7 Bracknell Forest 3rd and 10th December 2014

This group of participants represented a cross section of the Children's services directorates including a colleague from HR already a trained coach but keen to embed coaching across the whole organization and the Assistant Director. The AD's participation was extremely beneficial to the success of this programme, signaling the Directorate's commitment to the training and able to communicate their intention to embed coaching across Children's services. They were an enthusiastic and friendly group, very keen to develop and practice their skills. They all completed homework in practicing coaching with positive results. By the end of the course they were skilled in using the GROW model having practiced it 4 times and observed it 3 times and been coached 4 times.

| Questions | Response |
|--|--------------------------|
| Did the session meet its stated objectives? | 100% |
| Usefulness to you within your role | 100% outstanding or good |
| Potential Impact on future working practices | 100% outstanding or good |

What difference did participants feel this course will make to children and young people?

- Use with team ,teacher/pupil sessions and facilitating coaching in schools
- If implemented consistently across CSC it will make a huge difference
- Help staff to feel more empowered and resilient to deal with the increasing demands /workloads to make informed decisions about the quality and range of services they are providing for children , young people and parents in BF
- Empower staff to find their own solutions rather than me tell them
- Change people's mindsets

Participants said they would take forward what they had learned in the following ways:

- Use in 121's to take team forward
- Discuss strategic plan with the Director to build upon this training to help embed coaching at all levels
- Work with individual teachers in schools to encourage use within team meetings
- Use performance wheel as initial tool prior to appraisal process
- Create an action learning set with others on this course

Suggestions on how the senior team could help you implement coaching

- Time to take forward
- Promote model in schools to be accountable that the BFBC statement is cascaded and embedded
- Use coaching questions during meetings to identify ways in which schools can be supported effectively and challenged to make improvements roll out by providing training to enable us to train others

Comments made by participants on the particular strengths of the session include the following:

- Reflect on areas within work away from day to day pressures
- Can be taken back and embedded into everyday practice so the course has been really valuable

- Opportunities to practice coaching and using the vast array of tools covered within a safe environment
- Immediately applicable ,can be implemented by any individual within the organization regardless of status
- Fantastic focus on coaching within management and usefulness within the LA
- Good opportunities and time for reflection

Suggested areas for improvement

- Shorter sessions would help focus better
- Would like to hear more as generated real interest in me
- More info on group approaches

3.1.8 Surrey 28th November and 5th December 2014

This group of participants, most of whom were managers in children's social care, already had a lot of the essential skills which underpin coaching such as the ability to listen for deeper issues, foster trust and rapport, leave space for coachees to talk and gain commitment to action. They were an enthusiastic and friendly group, very keen to develop and practice their skills. They all completed homework in practising coaching with positive results. By the end of the course they were skilled in using the GROW model having practiced it 4 times and observed it 3 times and been coached 4 times.

| Questions | Response |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Did the session meet its stated objectives? | <i>100%</i> |
| Usefulness to you within your role | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |
| Potential Impact on future working practices | <i>100% outstanding or good</i> |

What difference did participants feel this course will make to children and young people?

- Empowering those who work with others to believe in their skills and attributes in managing change
- My supervisees should be able to develop their confidence around working positively with children and young people
- I think it will benefit work with children and young people by helping with job satisfaction and encouraging retention of staff

Participants said they would take forward what they had learned in the following ways:

- I want to relentlessly campaign to have every manager in my team attend the training and embed the culture of coaching across the fostering service
- To become more of an enabler and less of a rescuer

- Use on supervisees as part of supervision

Suggestions on how the senior team could help you implement coaching

- Have a coaching meeting - all trained staff to get-together quarterly to reflect and review and learn further from each other
- To fully embed as a supervisory requirement
- Believe in it and be seen to adopt it
- More frequent offering of this course-possibly adding a third day of it to give more time to how to coach highly resistant poor performing people who don't see y need to change

Comments made by participants on the particular strengths of the session included the following:

- First training I've done in a long time which I feel will have a significant transformative impact on my practice.
- Good mixture of learning resources used, approachable trainers.
- Presentation was excellent-engaging, fluent and the mixture of listening, watching, doing, reflecting was great.

Suggested areas for improvement

- More focus on managing resistance and practical tools
- Perhaps a greater gap between two days to allow for more practice
- Would've liked course to be longer in practice and feedback

4. The problems of evaluating education/coaching

4.1 Educational and coaching research is fraught with methodological problems associated with the difficulty of isolating a vast range of confounding variables. In this instance, the course aims to improve performance in authorities by improving leadership skills through the introduction of coaching. Evaluating the introduction of a two-day coaching course in a complex web of both internal and external influences on individual learning and leadership performance in local authorities would be an ambitious undertaking in the best of circumstances.

4.2 An evidence-based approach to evaluation would stress the need to measure impact via a true experimental design which included pre and post-test measures with control and treatment groups and randomisation of subjects to each limb. In the real world these types of research designs in educational research are rare largely because of cost but also because of the problems associated with randomisation and reductionist properties in randomised controlled trails which may not be helpful when considering the value of education programmes which are

significantly more complex than what is measured in experimental designs when the concentration is on the effect of one variable on another².

4.3 In this instance, no objective pre and post measures of learning and performance could be utilised. The data in this evaluation is based on individual participants' perceptions of their experience and, consequently, the validity of this evaluation as a measure of the impact of the course, is weak.

4.4 Value can be derived from naturalistic evaluation designs which explore the experience of participants by the researcher immersing themselves in the participants' experience. In some instances this involves ethnographic approaches including observation over a period of time both of the course itself and the context where the course is designed to have an impact, i.e. in practice settings. Such approaches take time and can also be expensive.

4.5 Real world approaches to evaluation take account of time, access and budgets. This evaluation had a relatively small budget which dictated the time available for data collection and analysis. Participants' individual perceptions of their experience of the course were collected immediately post course and again some months after the course had ended. The collection of immediate post course data was almost 100% successful given it was done before participants left the course.

4.6 The validity of this type of data is often questioned given that it is administered by course leaders and collected by them. Such measures are also criticised since they are unstandardized but they do pick up immediate issues of concern to participants. The quality of these perceptions is derived from their immediacy. The same cannot be said of post course data collection where memory failure is likely to impact on the quality of perceptions. In addition, perceptions could be thought of as simply thoughts and ideas about an experience all of which may be influenced by a variety of contextual issues.

5. Post course survey results

5.1 During the autumn of 2015 a survey was administered electronically via Survey Monkey to the 221 delegates who had attended one of the Coaching to Improve Performance courses. 29 (13.1%) responses were received, 2 (0.9%) opted out, 19 (8.6%) bounced back, leaving 171 non respondents. 29 delegates positively chose to respond out of a population of 202 who received the survey representing a response rate of 14.4% which is generally recognised as an acceptable response to postal/email surveys. (Given the sample size and population and a 95% confidence level, the confidence interval is 15).

5.2 Respondents' understanding of coaching increased from a mean of 4.7 on a scale of 0-10 before the course to 8.3 afterwards, an increase of 36%. (The generalization

² Keith Morrison (2001) Randomised Controlled Trials for Evidence-based Education: Some Problems in Judging 'What Works', Evaluation & Research in Education, 15:2, 69-83

to the population of 202 would suggest that the true increase lies somewhere between 21% and 51%). No tests of statistical significance were undertaken and therefore it is impossible to know to what extent the increase in understanding of coaching demonstrated above, might have occurred by chance.

5.3 59% of respondents said they used their new coaching skills on at least a weekly basis following the course. All but one of the respondents thought their new coaching skills had improved their effectiveness as a manager or leader to some extent with a third suggesting substantial improvements. Just under a third of respondents thought the introduction of coaching skills had led to direct improvements in service user outcomes.

5.4 Perhaps not surprisingly, examples provided of the use of coaching in practice tended to suggest that a 'style' of coaching was utilised rather than a pure coaching method. Respondents noted that this style had helped to empower their direct reports and had facilitated more two-way conversations. What was defined as most useful following the course was the lessons learned about listening to direct reports and giving them time to reach their own conclusions about solutions to their problems. The time necessary to use coaching methods in practice was the most mentioned barrier to its use.

5.5 Despite being highly rated, the learning taken from the course was described as being swamped by daily demands of the job. Of the third who thought the course had led to improvements for service users, the examples given were generally vague and non-specific.

5.6 The vast majority of respondents commented that coaching courses like this have little overall effect on an organisation unless that organisation adopts the philosophy of coaching as part of its leadership culture.

6. Interviews

6.1 A small number of more in-depth, telephone interviews were conducted with volunteers from the 29 respondents. Most could recall key elements of the content of the course particularly the GROW model. Most had been able to use their coaching skills with their direct reports indicating the usefulness of allowing those reports to arrive at solutions for themselves. This process was described as empowering for some of the direct reports. It was described as particularly useful with complex case work in social work services where time was needed to work through issues.

6.2 The use of coaching skills was largely mentioned as something undertaken as an individual. No corporate support for coaching was available and in some instances changes in the organisation since the course, had obliterated any strategic intent for its widespread use. There was a hint that in some authorities existing organisational culture would not facilitate the use of coaching more broadly particularly where the prevailing ethos was to process work quickly and efficiently.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 The Coaching to Improve Performance course was professionally delivered leading to a high standard of satisfaction amongst the delegates. After several months those who responded to a survey were still able to remember the salient content of the course, had retained enthusiasm and had put the skills learned to use in practice. A remarkable achievement for a two-day course!

7.2 Greater organisational support for the use of coaching in practice would certainly help local authorities to more fully reap the benefits that can emerge from coaching. In addition, the course is likely to be more effective as part of an organisation's strategic intent to improve the quality of leadership more generally.

7.3 Local authorities are recommended to explore how the use of coaching can assist leadership development in their organisations. Institutional support for leadership practice including coaching is likely to benefit local authorities' strategic intent to improve performance.

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March 2016