



## The Big Blue Box Ltd

### Coaching Teams

I'm often asked by prospective clients: 'Do you coach teams?' If I had to give a quick and simple response I would say that I don't coach teams.

But...I think we should be clear about what we actually mean and what is required. Within organisations we talk about 'teams', implying a sense of cohesion, that there is a 'singularity' about an identifiable group, that they have a common purpose. 'Teams' and 'Groups' are words that are often used interchangeably, indeed academic definitions of a Group might also define the Team.

So for the purposes of this discussion let us consider 3 broad scenarios where coaching is considered as part of the development portfolio:

#### **A real 'Team'**

All members have clear, inter-dependent roles, common or joint objectives, common skills and shared attitudes. The team could share responsibility for managing themselves. The performance of the whole team depends upon cooperation, integration, synergy and communication. A team may also have timescales within which performance is required; they may share a geographic location and resources, uniformity, common language and customs. An example of such an organisational team could be a project team, perhaps a sales team, but a further example could be a sport team – a group of people working towards a common goal.

In this scenario the development focus could be balanced between the building of the wider team and the skills of the individual and subgroups – the value of the whole team being greater than the sum of the parts!

The coaching direction may broadly prioritise development for the team as a whole, supported by specific sub team or individual coaching.

#### **Diffuse 'Group'**

This could describe a group who tend to work separately and are not 'inter-dependent' for their individual performance, but may have similar roles, rank and status. Whilst they may share a common overriding objective, this group are not bound together by that common purpose. More likely each is individually responsible for a part of the whole and likely to be focused on a more immediate objective, perhaps where there is clear delegated responsibility. This description might apply to a Board, HR business partners or regional managers.

It is within this broad scenario that there is the greater need for clarity. This group could be described as a team, suggesting that the coaching focus should be on the team. I suspect that particular needs may be better addressed at the individual level, developing skills from varied individual starting points and attitudes, rather than a 'one size fits all' or 'Team Building' approach designed for a team.

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With the coaching direction more appropriately focused upon the individual, leadership and delegation skills, strategic thinking, emotional intelligence would be part of the potential skill development set.

### **Individual coaching**

This is the simplest and most frequent format for coaching, addressing the particular needs of an individual.

The coaching direction is absolutely focused upon the needs of the individual, unlocking and maximising their potential at the time.

I focus on coaching for individuals on a 'one to one' basis. I also provide coaching for diffuse groups, where the coaching is delivered at a one to one, individual level, addressing the diverse development and support needs to bring each person towards their potential.

I am cautious about providing coaching for a team as a unit, I believe that the skills and approach for coaching a real team are different from those required to coach an individual.

When actually unpicked, what may be presented as 'Team Coaching' may actually be 'individual coaching within a diffuse group of people'. I suspect that many a supposed 'team' may be better addressed as a diffuse group or a number of individuals. I would suggest that in almost every situation when I have been asked to 'coach a team', that the real solution is 'coaching for individuals'!

It is possible that the 'groups' of people labelled as 'Teams', may not be teams at all but could be diffuse groups of people who share a common description, and that the coaching solutions for a true Team, for a diffuse Group, and for an individuals are all significantly different.