



## The Big Blue Box Ltd

### Remote Coaching

There is an increasing demand for coaching as it becomes recognised as a powerful tool for supporting and developing key people. But the conundrum is that these key people don't have time, or cannot 'meet' due to travel commitments, and yet may need the opportunity to stop, reflect and plan before moving on.

So whilst ideally, and traditionally, coaching is a 'face to face' activity, to provide the vital support to these key people, there has to be a compromise. And perhaps that compromise may bring particular advantages.

#### 1. What is 'remote' coaching?

Coaching is normally a 'face to face' conversation, with the coach and coachee in the same location, perhaps in a quiet room, undisturbed.

Remote coaching describes those interactions where the coach and coachee cannot hold the conversation 'face to face'. The interaction may take place by normal telephone, by video link, 'Skype', email, or perhaps utilising social media, a 'tablet' device or calling using the facilities within a 'smart phone'.

This can mean that the conversation can be 'international', across 'time zones' and doesn't have to be 'continuous' - there could be intervals – for example if using email or messaging.

#### 2. What are the benefits of remote coaching?

There are some highly significant benefits to consider for remote coaching.

##### a) Cost

There are potential savings in the cost of travel and venue. No one has to travel to a meeting.

##### b) Convenience

As travel is not a consideration it is easier to make time available for coaching. A conversation can now be hosted through a wide choice of media and at convenient times. It can even be 'ad hoc' – a conversation being held at the very time of need – assuming both parties are available.

##### c) Time

Remote coaching sessions are efficient, as the interruption to the working day is reduced and less 'commitment' of time is required – remote coaching sessions take less total time. And as there are possible 'time zone' and 'time shift' considerations, the remote coaching could be scheduled for 'down time' or at more flexible, mutually convenient times than the normal working hours.

##### d) Responsiveness and Accessibility

There is some experience that indicates that remote coaching sessions may be shorter but more frequent. And it is also quicker to arrange a phone call than a meeting in a mutually convenient location.

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### e) Selection

A key factor in any coaching relationship is the 'chemistry' between coach and coachee. Remote coaching ensures that the coachee can have access and support from their preferred coach, facilitating the ongoing relationship. And project sponsors can use the appropriate coach for the particular project.

### f) Effectiveness

Some situations lend themselves to remote coaching, particularly if there is an ongoing relationship and a clear agenda for the coaching. Some coachees respond to the directness and focus orientation that remote coaching tends to require.

### 3. What are the key points to consider when setting up remote coaching?

There are some general considerations that are particularly important in remote coaching:

#### a) Relationship

Coaching is about the relationship and the 'chemistry' is vital, be prepared to invest time in building trust. It is not an absolute requirement but remote coaching works really well when there has been a previous 'face to face' conversation. Consider using 'visual' media or ideally, facilitating a 'face to face' meeting in the early stages.

#### b) Environment

It is important to find a time and a space to have the conversation, background noise, interruptions, telephones, messages and computer screens can all intrude into the conversation.

#### c) Etiquette, Multitasking

Give time to the coaching – texting, emails and messaging or doing other tasks in the coaching session means that the focus is not on the coaching. Remove those temptations!

#### d) Communication

Because much of the body language, facial expression, 'signalling', communication, intonation and their meaning could be missing we have to be more aware of how the other party is feeling, reacting, etc. Consider looking 'into the camera' when using video so that the other party experiences 'eye contact'. Whilst non verbal communication can help to signal the necessary flow or direction of a 'face to face' coaching session, silence on a telephone call could be misunderstood. We have to communicate that we are still in communication!

#### e) Agenda

A 'face to face' conversation can be allowed (and even encouraged) to 'wander', but it is perhaps more necessary to have an agenda when undertaking remote coaching. An agreed agenda could assist in retaining direction and focus whilst coaching remotely.

### 4. How could a remote coaching project be structured?

These are a number of options to consider when planning remote coaching:

- The structure of a remote coaching project can be more flexible as sessions are easier to arrange, but a series of session dates should still be planned and commitments made in the diary
- Remote coaching projects may require more sessions - typically six sessions

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- There should also be a clear limit to the total resourcing to ensure that there is sufficient 'imperative' and motivation to achieve any outcomes within agreed limits
- Coaching sessions are likely to be shorter and more frequent
- Equivalent amounts of total coaching time should be potentially available (when compared to 'face to face' coaching)
- Whilst each session could potentially be of indeterminate duration, each session should only continue as long as it is being effective – the length of the session is not important. The quality and impact of the session is not determined by its duration
- The scope and agenda for remote coaching may benefit from being more specific and targeted
- Any briefing from the coachee's manager, or project sponsor will potentially need to be more thorough in order to guide the coach to the key development / support issues and assist in defining the scope and agenda
- Consider minimising any potential interference, risks, communication and technical issues that could impede the effective set up – 'test' any technical set up
- As with a 'face to face' session, the coachee's commitment to the session and process is paramount. Whilst the coaching session could just be a telephone call, coachee's should allow themselves time to prepare and allow time after each coaching session to 'normalise' before rejoining their working environment