

## The Coach is Dead, Long Live the Coach

**Abstract:** This is a deliberately provocative article inviting buyers to consider if they are misled into buying coaching when cheaper services are available; a set of simple criteria is offered to help decide whether buyers are misled or not. In the event that a buyer does want coaching, an easy test is provided to act as a screening method to separate the chaff from the wheat. Some ideas are also included for coaches to provoke a new approach from them - to help them in delivering cost-effective services and to distinguish themselves from the chaff.

### Introduction

The coaching bandwagon is in gridlock. A multitude of the people we thought of as psychologists, trainers and consultants (as well as a whole lot of new entrants to the market) are calling themselves coaches. Many of these have little training of any worth, have meaningless or no qualifications of any credible standard and have minimal talent for providing value for money. The coach is not so much dead, as buried under the dense fog of bandwagon-groupies calling themselves 'coaches'!

If you wish to be confident in buying value-for-money coaching, what should you do? How can you have confidence in selecting coaches? Is there a simple test which excludes the look-alikes from the talent that may be obscured behind them? And, if you are a good or great coach with little work, what can you do to differentiate yourself and be noticed? I hope to help you to answer these questions or to provoke thinking that may be productive to you.

### What is coaching

If you look at the market, coaching is almost anything you want (or do not want) it to be and therefore confusing. If you asked 30 different organizations to deliver a definition of what they would deliver for you as coaching, the chances are that you would get thirty different presentations with a wide variety of offerings. How do buyers get confident to do anything in these circumstances? Why should you bother? What buyers are finding is that existing consultancies are rebranding their services from, say, consulting psychologists to 'coaching' when they are still selling one or more psychometric instruments and, quite properly trying to add real value to these instruments by selling 1-2-1s with the participants as 'coaching' in their delivery. Another organization majoring on NLP will have rebranded its consultancy as 'coaching' to see if they can produce more sales from the same offering and using exactly the same people! These existing supplies with rebranded staff make it even harder for a buyer to have confidence.

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We can safely aver that the word 'coaching' can now be ignored as almost meaningless; as a buyer in our confused market it is much better to focus on the type of human change you want. Once you define that, look for references from others who have already succeeded in making similar changes, whether branded 'coaching' or not.

## Facilitative coaching and why it works

When we instruct people, they are generally less motivated than in they have a solution of their own to carry out. Worse, many people who are regularly instructed, will remain dependent on us for more answers. Many managers like to be needed in this way but that is not usually what managers are paid to do – they should be developing their people so those people are self-starting and largely independent of management time. When managers answer questions with another question they encourage independent thinking - this helps people to find their own solutions, test the benefits and demerits of those solutions and move forward with motivated solutions. It also produces a new and more productive mindset for handling the subsequent challenge.

Facilitated coaching works on the basis of asking questions, not providing answers. The coaching manager only provides information or direction in two situations: firstly, if the situation is urgent and, secondly, if the individual does not have enough knowledge, skill or context to move forward alone without further resources (from you or other people/places). When the coaching manager moves to provide information, they are moving to mentoring or support/direction but then return to facilitation mode again, as soon as possible.

## You think you want to buy coaching!

Facilitative coaching is most effective in creating significant mental shifts in thinking and hence producing significant behaviour and performance change. If you buy in coaches but do not see behavioural/performance change, then you did not get this type (facilitative) coaching. To avoid that happening, we recommend setting out the behavioural/performance changes required so that coach and coachee and buyer/client are all on the same page. If the individual can agree and make those changes, and do that in a healthy (sustainable) way, then they do not need a coach at all! However, we often get called when appeals for change have not made any significant difference. What the client wants is a psychological shift to make the difference in the individual – facilitative coaching is then a very good place to get changes that will be observable by changes behaviours/performance.

Facilitative coaching is also used to:

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1. Enhance the application of management/leadership training programmes that are designed to challenge and create significant psychological and emotional development in people
2. Produce next-level performance including influencing and motivational skills in managers
3. Provide support for a 'coaching culture' as part (typically) of a larger strategy including training.

I have an unusual fourth application, niche work, in which I am hired to help turn around very senior people who have become isolated, dominating or partly dysfunctional. In some case I am employed to work with whole boards in order that one 'problem director' can be 'fixed'! In fact, what happens in these specialist cases is that the individual remains un-coachable until the moment when they decide to work with me. Once this is achieved<sup>1</sup>, they fix themselves while I oil their process with a lubricant of sculpted questions and challenges.

It is only when you want major shifts in psychological skills in order to generate new behaviours and performance that facilitative coaching is likely to add cost-effective value. Even then, the senior environment they return to must be ready for those changes (or they will be motivated to leave and work elsewhere). If you want people to learn how to learn practical skills and methods, then they need training not coaching - this will be a lot cheaper and more cost-effective.

## So you still want to buy in a coach?

The coach who can facilitate shifts in psychology will have a number of characteristic traits including these:

1. They will listen more and talk less
2. They will be totally comfortable with quiet spaces in the gaps between conversation
3. They will be confident and amiable
4. They will not have pumped up, fragile egos and be telling you how great they are
5. Their speech will be more 'service' than 'sales' oriented

These traits give us the possibility to simply discard those that do not meet these criteria. Here are test questions to ask of yourself after having had a conversation with a prospective coach, or a supplier of coaching services:

1. Are you being talked at?
2. If you leave a pause in the conversation, do they instantly start talking?
3. Do they look or sound slightly unbelievable?
4. Do they talk themselves up and are they cagey about quickly providing a list of customers and named citations?
5. Do you feel, later, like the victim of clever and artful manipulation?

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<sup>1</sup> Typically this takes between 12-20 minutes but very occasionally may take over an hour.

## Further testing

Other checks include these:

If they are talking about a whole raft of coaching models and tools then it is unlikely they are facilitative coaches since the latter have quiet and attentive minds tuned to develop people around them; that is, they listen more and do not have minds crowded with things that are important to them – they should be much more attentive to you and your needs.

When you ask them a challenging question, are they really listening to you or, are they constructing a careful answer to the first challenge in their head. If so, they will not hear your second question! Testing this is easy, just ask three quite challenging things in one single monologue and then watch and listen carefully! Let two of these questions be, 'how can you measure the effectiveness of what you might do for us and how can we be confident of a cost-benefit'?

## What can coaches do to be noticed

Maybe it is time for coaches to rebrand or at least differentiate their brands from 'coaching' to something specific and meaningful? They might add a strap-line to provide further, useful context to potential buyers. What is the effect of a coach in practice? Why not sell that 'effect' and brand the effect, rather than call it coaching. For example, a brand might be 'executive boost' with a range of offerings: boost performance confidence, boost performance perception, boost performance motivation. When one changes to a branded 'effect', several supporting technologies might emerge to provide a blended approach including short training interventions with groups, web-based materials and exercises for example. These services could be supported with 1-2-1s to enhance the learning and to demonstrate to participants the type of language and skills that they will need to perform better at work.

Further differentiation from others in the market can usefully include coach training, meaningful qualifications and the availability of quality references from named sources.

## Conclusion

Coaching is not dead, it's alive and well in a sea of so-called 'coaches' doing many other things. Rather than fight it or wait years for change, we need to learn to live with the confusion and find ways forward that work beneficially.

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Coaching, in various forms has been around for many years . Tim Gallwey founded modern coaching<sup>2</sup> as a facilitating style of human development several decades ago. Tim's wise messages have been drowned out by noise! It is the view of this author that so much has crowded into coaching that the term itself is almost meaningless (without a mass of contextual information). That puts the onus on buyers to work very hard to find what they need. Market differentiation must be the key and coaches wishing to succeed in their chosen sector or niche are well-advised to differentiate now and not wait for the market to evolve. In time, it is expected that specialist brands of facilitative coaching will evolve with proper professional bodies and appropriate standing. Buyers everywhere must relish that prospect!

### **Author's Bio**

Dr Angus McLeod is author of many papers & books on coaching, NLP and leadership. Books include, *Performance Coaching* and *Me, Myself, My Team* (both Crown House), *Self-coaching Leadership* (John Wiley) and *Performance Coaching Toolkit* (McGraw-Hill/OU, 2010). He designed two (distance-learning) performance coaching diploma courses at Newcastle College with over 15,000 students to date. He researches and supervises academic research in the UK and has a close association with Birmingham City University Business School. Angus McLeod facilitates master-classes in coaching, trains managers and coaches 1-2-1 internationally. Contact: [ourinfo@angusmcleod.com](mailto:ourinfo@angusmcleod.com) or +44 1684 594 113. Web: [www.angusmcleod.com](http://www.angusmcleod.com).

### **Angus McLeod Associates**

Angus McLeod Associates offers and trains coaches. The company trains managers in the use of coaching skills to use in their day-to-day managing styles. The website provides a significant resource for free information for managers, leaders and coaches as well as free newsletters and access to a library of videos.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example his later work: Gallwey, W.T. (2002). *The Inner Game of Work*, NY & London: Texere Publishing.