

COACHING FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT: A THOUGHT PAPER

Executives typically become more focused on the need to take charge of the development of their careers when stress, pressure, turbulence and change are high profile in their working lives, or when they're experiencing unease, or lack of satisfaction or purpose. While such situations can be urgent, the importance for leaders to proactively manage their careers is nevertheless constant. It is equally critical for organisations to proactively support leaders' career development in order to plan their workforces and develop their talent strategies.

Career development needs to take account of some key trends. The global recession and ageing populations mean that older senior people are delaying their retirement and are staying in the workforce for longer. Succession planning may now bring surprises for some who had taken it for granted that they were on a steady path to the top. Globalisation means a shift of wealth, power and influence from West to East, and from North to South. Global talent will continue to be at a premium as companies in the burgeoning economies of China and India import experienced talent, some of which will come from migrants returning home.¹ Equally the full potential of women to occupy senior positions has yet to be tapped.

Careers will become more flexible and for many are likely to consist of a series of projects. People are likely to have several different careers during the course of their working lives and they are likely to be more globally mobile. Career management is being outsourced to its owners² and the need for self-knowledge will escalate. Executives need to shape and manage their careers to satisfy their values, passions and strengths **and** respond to the trends.

I believe that any adequate theory of career development needs to adopt a holistic view, and to go beyond the cognitive and the transactional to take account of the patterns and meanings that lie behind the career choices that people make. Donald Super's work resonates for me because he reflects the reality of human nature in emphasising self-concept, and its development over an individual's lifetime. Super believes that in making a vocational choice individuals are expressing their self-concept, or understanding of self, which implies that coaching for career development needs to facilitate the individual to achieve this understanding and to work out how to use it to make aware choices.

Intrinsic to self-understanding is awareness of personal purpose. The extent to which an individual is working towards their purpose offers a valuable barometer for how meaningful their working life and their career direction are to them. And it is this sense of meaning that enables the fulfilment, motivation and passion which translate into focus, energy, performance and inspiring leadership.

"The career coaching programme enabled me to define with great precision what I really enjoy doing, what I do better than others, and where there's a need on the market. The combination of these now allows me to enjoy working in a lucrative way, in a space that provides me with fulfilment and satisfaction, with a very clear 'unique selling proposition' and I am in demand."

GLOBAL INTEGRATION SPECIALIST,
6 YEARS AFTER THE COMPLETION OF HIS COACHING PROGRAMME

Who are you, how can you use your strengths more fully, where do you fit in your organisation and beyond, and what does this mean for your career choices? This is the platform on which I have developed the Wittenberg Career Coaching Model. I work towards the individual 'becoming totally what they already are and what they potentially can become'.³ I take them on an expedition to explore a number of areas: Where they are now? What's their story and the pattern of their decisions? What are their passions, strengths and values? What's the nature of their personality? What's the pattern of their systems? What are their aspirations, visions and purpose? What might be the tripwires (both external and internal)? What are their conclusions? And what therefore is the plan going forward?

The model is used as a framework within which the path of the coaching evolves organically. It has proven to be robust and to enable sustainable change because of its depth of enquiry and its core Gestalt-based principles: focus on the coaching relationship; dialogue in which the coach listens deeply so that the coaching client feels deeply heard; a systemic perspective; a focus on the here and now through awareness; and creativity and experimentation. Gestalt's open-mindedness encourages flexibility to draw creatively on all other approaches.

The Academy of Executive Coaching's Certificates in 'The Psychology of Coaching' and 'Gestalt Coaching Skills'⁴ were the launchpad to the crafting of my approach. I am person-centred in the manner of Carl Rogers, system-focused (drawing on, for example, John Whittington's work on Constellations Coaching⁵) and anchored in mindfulness.

Coaching clients gain a profound sense of self which equips them to make aware choices both immediately and – our follow-up demonstrates – long after their programmes have ended.

They tell me that they experience a 'coming together', a sense of both integration and integrity, which both brings personal peace and is energising. They gain a broader perspective on the opportunities they can access or create, a sharper sense of focus and direction, more resilience and less stress, a heightened awareness of their strengths and how to apply them at work, greater ability to tap in to their capabilities, and a deeper sense of where they fit within their organisations and how they can make a richer contribution. Roles and paths that previously had seemed restricted or unfulfilling often open up into new possibilities. And their employers gain more fulfilled and effective leaders.

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¹ See more at 'Building the New Leader': Hay Group Leadership 2030 research

² Tammy Johns of Manpower Inc., quoted in 'The Future of Work', David Bollier, 2011

³ Based on the work of Petrushka Clarkson, 'Gestalt Counselling in Action', 2004, Sage Publications

⁴ www.aoec.com

⁵ www.coachingconstellations.com