

The Sherwood Coaching Handbook

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Why you may find this handbook useful

The coaching of lawyers and other senior professionals has developed over recent years in two distinct ways:

- Partners, heads of practice groups and senior associates seeking the benefits of coaching to challenge and guide them through key phases of their career; and
- Partners and others grasping that part of their role as leaders is to stretch and support members of their team - in short, being a coach to their team.

These developments are in line with research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) which showed that more than six out of ten respondents in their 2007 survey (see www.cipd.co.uk/onlineinfodocuments/surveys) across all industries reported that they now use coaching in their organisations. Of these just over 50% said that their organisation sees coaching as a 'permanent style' of management and 73% of respondents expect to see coaching by line managers increase in the next few years.

At the same time, we have seen some firms succeed in developing a coaching culture, whilst others are finding this difficult. The issues include confusion over:

- Exactly what coaching is
- How best to manage the stakeholders in coaching
- When coaching is, and is not, an appropriate intervention
- How to work effectively with an increasingly complex and fragmented coaching industry.

So this Handbook:

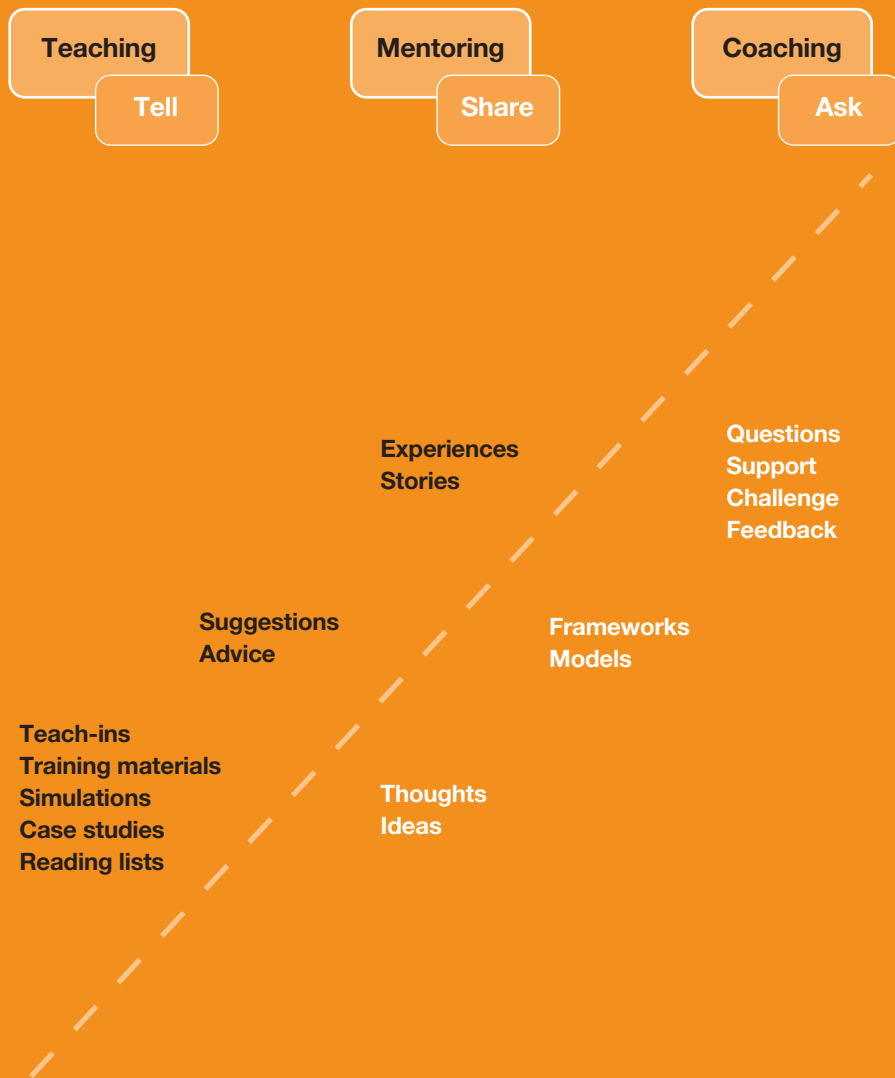
- Demystifies what coaching really is and how it is different from other styles of working, such as mentoring
- Gives guidance on how to set up effective coaching programmes
- Explains how to find and select good coaches
- Provides tips on how to gain the best value from coaching.

Whether you are a managing partner, head of HR or other potential user or buyer of coaching, we hope you'll find something useful in the following pages.

On the assumption that you do (or even if you don't!), we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please get in touch with your usual Sherwood contact, or email info@sherwoodpsfconsulting.com or telephone 01530 560316 or visit www.sherwoodpsfconsulting.com.

'Teaching - Mentoring - Coaching' Spectrum



What is coaching? What is its purpose?

To answer the second question first – coaching enables people to perform more effectively at work. Coaching is designed to be of benefit to the individual and to the organisation in which they work. In fact one of the building blocks to a successful coaching relationship (between coachee, coach and organisation) is an agreed vision of what the people involved want to achieve.

An actual coaching session is a one-to-one discussion over a period of one to two hours. It may be preceded by a telephone conversation to establish the key points that will be addressed and to see if there is any preparatory work that either the coach or coachee should do. Afterwards there may be a follow-up telephone call to review progress. If a face to face meeting is impractical, a coaching session can take the form of a telephone conversation once the coach and coachee have established a good working relationship.

Depending on the circumstances behind the decision to engage in coaching, there will usually be a series of meetings or, more unusually, a single, one-off session as appropriate.

The role of the coach is to help the individual:

- Increase their professional self-awareness in terms of their work, their role, how they currently approach it
- Identify what is going well and what is not, the underlying causes and what therefore would help them perform at a higher level
- Take responsibility for making changes that will enable them to perform at that higher level – what do they need to stop, start or carry on doing or do differently.

The style of the coach will generally be “non-directive”. The coach is not there as a trainer or expert adviser telling the coachee what to do. So in a coaching meeting the coach will spend a lot of time asking questions that help (and even force) the coachee to think about their work and working relationships in a deeper way than they have, or have had the opportunity to do, in the past.

In this context what a coach needs to be good at is:

- Prompting the appropriate self-reflection on the part of the coachee, for instance by asking the appropriate question at the optimal moment
- Listening in an attentive and open minded way
- Encouraging and helping the coachee to develop their own ideas, options and plans.

The end point of a coaching session will usually be a practical plan for specific action to which the coachee is committed: something concrete – not just a vague feeling of well-being.

It is helpful to distinguish between coaching and mentoring. In the latter the coach/mentor brings some sector and/or role specific knowledge – i.e. in relation to the coachee they have “been there, seen it, done it” too. This can often be helpful, provided the mentor still adopts a coaching style and does not lapse into simply regaling the coachee with war stories of their individual acts of heroism and unorthodox brilliance! Of course coaching and mentoring can overlap – with powerful results.

Case study 1

A partner was being coached on aspects of leadership as part of a 'high performance leadership development programme'; his 'line manager' subsequently told the coach (but was unwilling to tell the partner until persuaded otherwise) that the promotion of the partner to office managing partner was contingent on his demonstrating a willingness to be more consultative in his approach to decision-making. A 'round table' meeting resulted in a much clearer understanding of the purpose of the coaching, and, unsurprisingly, more commitment and change of approach from the partner. This shows how important it is to clarify specific objectives at the outset - especially when the coaching is offered as part of the firm's normal leadership development programme.

Case study 2

A partner had been offered coaching to help him build a new practice following a strategic decision by the firm to move out of his specialist area and to increase market share in another relatively new specialist segment of the same market. At the initial 'chemistry' meeting, it became obvious that one option the individual partner wanted to explore was leaving the firm and doing something completely different. Having got 'clearance' from the firm that there were no 'off limits' topics for the coaching, the partner explored all options and eventually decided to stay and build the new area (with the aid of a realistic timescale and resourcing plan developed in the coaching sessions and agreed by the firm). In a similar case, the outcome was that the partner left the firm and went to a competitor having negotiated an exit that left everyone feeling good about the result.

Case study 3

An associate who was on 'track to partnership' was offered coaching to help him find a way of increasing his visibility within the partnership and to tackle some negative perceptions (amongst people who did not know him well) about his 'gravitas'. The HR director made it clear to the coach that the main objective was to help the individual develop and that partnership in the current year was unlikely because of these personal attributes rather than for lack of 'business case'. It rapidly became clear that the associate had not been told (or had not 'heard') this message and he wanted to focus on creating his business plan. A round table meeting with sponsoring partner, the HRD manager, the coach and the associate resolved the confusion and helped to refocus the associate on successfully tackling the behavioural and reputational issues (as well as doing his business plan).

When is coaching appropriate?

Coaching can be effective in a variety of situations, for example:

- Helping an individual prepare for a specific challenge
 - e.g. putting together a business case, presenting to a new client, addressing a conference
- Understanding and meeting the challenges following promotion e.g. to partner
- Getting to grips with a new role e.g. managing partner, head of department, HR partner
- Developing new skills, especially interpersonal skills appropriate to: leading and motivating individuals and teams, influencing others, and tackling difficult situations.

In each of these situations coaching offers tailored support that can accelerate the individual's learning, effectiveness and development.

Coaching can also support high-performers in addressing aspects of their performance which may need to change, for example how they interact with clients or with colleagues.

In addition many firms are now actively encouraging the use of internal mentors - experienced colleagues who are willing to guide, support and accelerate the learning and development of others in the firm. This can be a powerful and cost-effective way of developing key individuals while passing on the culture and values of the firm in question - your way of doing things.

These internal mentors may themselves benefit from coaching and understanding the benefits of using a coaching style.

An external coach who has some shared experience with the coachee (e.g. been a partner or senior manager in a law firm), may be able to combine the benefits of coaching and mentoring.

And when is coaching (at least on its own) not appropriate?

When what the person really needs is:

- Technical legal training
- Effective line management
- Therapy or counselling (responsible business coaches should not stray into areas where they are not qualified to help).

Finally, effective coaching is built on the assumption (which may need testing) that the coachee is a volunteer and has the physical and psychological energy to set and work towards challenging goals.

What people have said about coaching by Sherwood

From a newly promoted partner as part of her induction process:

I found working with Sherwood inspirational. It gave me practical and workable insights into how a partnership is run, how to plan strategically and how to manage and run a team. The process has really made me think outside the box.

After one session with a partner torn between his current successful career and other ambitions he has for his life:

I'm enormously grateful. It was immensely illuminating. Amazing that a 1½ hour session could have such an impact. It crystallised my thinking. I realised I've got time - I don't need to do it today. I can concentrate on what I'm doing now. I feel a lot better; I've stopped beating myself up about it.

From a managing partner concerned about his management style and where he should be leading the firm:

I feel in a strange place. I never expected to finish up here. I feel liberated. Those maudlin feelings I had at the start are all gone. I see now that what I have been doing up to now is managing skilfully. Now I can lead them in something I really believe in. I always find these sessions intellectually refreshing. Best 2 hours I've spent in a long time.

From a regional managing partner faced with integrating a local merger and adjusting to a major restructuring of the whole firm:

It's extraordinary..... you never actually tell me anything and yet after an hour or so talking to [my coach] I know exactly what I need and want to do next.

How to find the right coach

There are four options:

- Outside coaching specialists
- Partners in leadership roles, such as the managing partner or practice group leaders
- Other partners in the firm who are naturally good coaches
- Senior support professionals, such as the BD director or HR director.

Here are the pros and cons of each option.

Outside coaching specialists

These people will have the appropriate coaching skills - of asking good questions, listening well and helping people take responsibility. They will not bring assumptions or baggage or personal agendas into the relationship with the coachee. They can be objective and see or raise issues that have not been apparent to people within the organisation.

The confidential nature of the coaching relationship enables trust to be established which may not be possible where there is an expectation of internal reporting back. The coachee may therefore be prepared to talk about issues (whether ambitions or perceived weaknesses) that they would keep back from someone within the organisation.

Outside coaches, however, may not understand the culture of the organisation or the realities of the working life of a lawyer - or at least that may be the perception of the coachee. Having sector specific knowledge can bridge this potential credibility gap.

Partners in leadership roles (i.e. the boss)

This person may be the obvious candidate to undertake a coaching role - they know the person and the circumstances. What they may lack are the skills, the inclination and, importantly, the time.

Some partners will be able to adopt an effective coaching style and still be a demanding boss who, for example, carries out performance appraisals. Others will find it difficult to combine these approaches. In addition, exceptional legal expertise can get in the way of an effective coaching relationship. The expert lawyer may feel more comfortable addressing issues of technical competence but this may be missing the point.

Other partners (i.e. peers)

Some of the best coaches can be within the organisation but not be technical experts in the same field as the person being coached. An interesting experiment was carried out in the sports world that showed that there were certain circumstances in which ski coaches performed better than tennis coaches at coaching tennis! This was because the ski instructors were forced to focus more on listening to and understanding the person they were working with, rather than focussing on the correct technique. This is the so-called “inner game” in which the opponent in tennis or barrier to top performance in golf was the voice inside one’s head saying what one must, should or ought to do rather than the person on the other side of the net or the difficulty of the golf shot! The partner from another department who is not going to tell the coachee how to do their job and is not going to carry out their next appraisal may get a better reception than the boss.

Using partners in this role will entail finding people with some natural aptitude and a willingness to learn more about coaching. Then it will be a matter of finding or creating opportunities for them to practise.

This approach can create a group of partners who have a positive impact on the performance of others and at the same time maybe break down unhealthy divisions between practice groups.

Senior support professionals

Coaching by senior support professionals (who are not formally trained coaches) can be very effective within their area of responsibility e.g. on running pitches from a business development director or developing better team working from a human resources director.

A partner or other senior lawyer may prefer the opportunity of a one-to-one conversation rather than going on a traditional training programme which may be seen as the “remedial” option. Again it will be a question of the business support person having the appropriate style and skills and time.

In fact some firms are now investing in coaching training for their senior support professionals and recognising that coaching is a key part of their role.

Meyer Campbell’s ten tough questions to ask potential coaching providers

- 1 What style of coaching do you use and why?
How do you distinguish between coaching, counselling and mentoring?
- 2 Where were you trained?
How many of your associates have formal training in coaching and where were you / they accredited?
Tell me about your breadth of experience
What other relevant formal qualifications do you / your associates have?
What professional memberships do you / your associates have?
- 3 What ongoing professional development do you / your associates undertake?
- 4 Tell me about a coaching “success story”
When has your coaching failed?
- 5 How do you monitor the individual and organisational impact of your coaching performance?
How do you evaluate your coaching?
What reporting methods do you use?
- 6 What support and monitoring systems do you have for yourself?
Who coaches you / your associates?
Who supervises you / your associates?
- 7 Tell me in what situation you would not coach
Are there any individuals you would not coach, and how do you identify them?
- 8 Tell me about your availability to a coaching client
Where does your coaching occur?
- 9 Who can I speak to about your coaching?
- 10 May I ask what led you to choose to work as a coach?

(Reprinted courtesy of Meyler Campbell – leading providers of coaching training)

The stakeholders in the coaching process



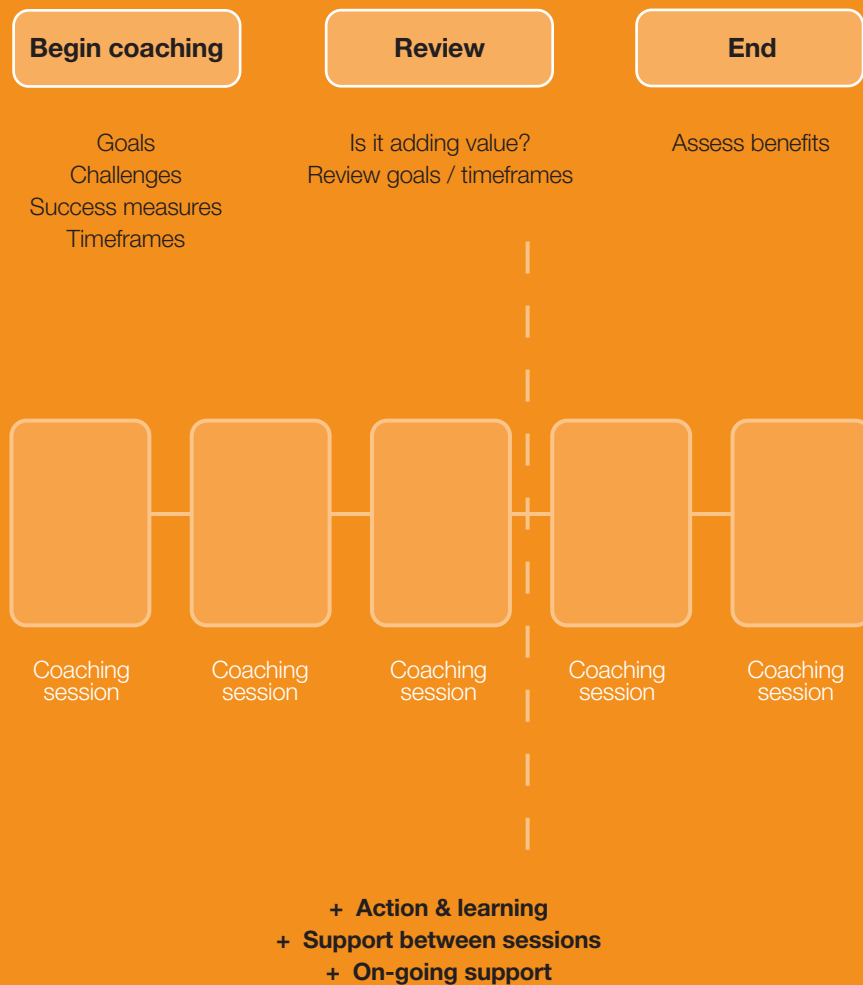
The coaching process: getting the coaching contract right

This should come naturally to lawyers and law firms, but we often find we have to prompt both the individual client and the sponsoring firm to invest enough time at the start in addressing questions such as:

- **What exactly is the coaching intended to help the individual to do (differently) or to achieve?**
We encourage sponsoring clients to set performance objectives (within the control of the individual) rather than simply outcome objectives (which may be influenced by external factors). This distinction between input by the coachee (e.g. keeping in contact with key clients between transactions) and outputs (e.g. getting two new transactions from a key client) is important and can help move the coaching towards practical action planning rather than creating unrealistic wish-lists. Sometimes it takes one or more coaching sessions to get clarity on this important question. Sometimes getting such clarity is the very purpose of the coaching.
- **How and by whom will 'success' be measured (and over what period)?
What evidence can and should be collected, when and by whom?**
Answers range widely from - 'the individual client will assess utility and progress for himself', through to 'we want a comprehensive 'before and after' 360 feedback process'.
- **Are there any parameters/limits to what the coaching can address?**
For example, is it appropriate to spend time talking about alternative career paths with an associate who is receiving pre-partnership coaching or to a partner who is being asked to change the focus of his or her practice to fit the firm's new strategy?
- **What if any are the limits to the confidentiality obligation as between individual client and coach?**
We start from the basis that it is absolute, but there may be some legitimate exceptions.
- **Who reports back to whom and on what?**
We prefer limiting our role to reporting on number and duration of coaching sessions, with the individual client doing the rest.
- **What information/feedback will be given to the coach about the individual and/or the relevant business context and can all of it be shared?**
We recommend complete transparency but again there may be a few legitimate exceptions to this.
- **Can the coach talk to others within the firm or outside, such as clients?**
e.g. to gather feedback on perceptions of the individual client - if so, what can the coach say about the individual and the purpose of the coaching?

There are also the straightforward questions about how many sessions, payment and cancellation terms, the minimum/maximum budget available, timescale for an interim review, and other logistics to be clarified. Getting the contract right from the outset is an essential element in getting value from coaching. This is addressed in more detail in the section on "How to get value from coaching".

A typical coaching programme



The coaching process: what does a coaching “programme” look like?

We are often asked this question. Coaching is meant to be a flexible tool so there will not be a “one-size fits all” way of describing a coaching programme. But both the coachee and firm contemplating the use of coaching for the first time legitimately want some guidelines or parameters.

Structure (of the sessions) follows purpose - or should do.

So coaching for:

- a one-off event (e.g. a pitch)
 - probably a one-off session
- transition into a new role
 - probably monthly sessions over a six month period
- change in behavioural style
 - probably four to six sessions with some “front-loading” and then longer gaps between later sessions
- ongoing support in a mentoring capacity
 - probably on an ad-hoc basis after two or three initial meetings.

Except for the one-off event, it will often take a couple of meetings to establish the best structure for the individual coachee. So if there was a rule of thumb for an organisation that wanted a predictable and consistent format it would be - chemistry meeting then three sessions then review then two/three further sessions and final review.

Checking progress and value

The individual coachee might ask:

“Is this being helpful?”

“Am I getting more clarity on what needs to happen?”

“Do I feel more confident about taking this on?”

The business sponsor (e.g. department head)
and organisation (e.g. HR) might ask:

“Are we seeing the individual wanting to take action?”

“Do they seem more confident?”

“Are we seeing a change in behaviour?”

The coach might usefully consider:

“Does the individual seem to be engaged?”

“Are they taking actions forward?”

“Am I the right person to be coaching this individual?”
(i.e. “Do I know somebody better suited?”)

How to get value from coaching

Given the private and confidential nature of the relationship between coach and coachee, there can obviously be some issues for the budget-holder as to how to ensure you get value for money from the investment. Here are some suggestions:

- Ensure the coaching is aligned to business needs
 - we advocate having 4-way discussions at the outset to ensure there is alignment between:
 - Coachee
 - Coach
 - Organisation / budget-holder (e.g. HR)
 - Business sponsor (e.g. head of department or managing partner)

In every session, although the individual and the coach will be the people physically there, the interests of these four parties need to be taken into account. To give voice to the ‘silent partners’, the budget-holder should clarify the organisation’s needs with management and communicate priorities to coachees, and to both internal and external coaches.

Areas that might be relevant for such briefings might include, for example:

- Strategic objectives of the firm or the relevant part of it
 - Culture and values
 - Leadership behaviours expected
- Set measurable objectives at the outset, such as, write a business plan by [date], and establish a clear evaluation process

Evaluation should start from the moment the coaching begins. Increasingly organisations are using four-way contracting for coaching interventions to clarify the organisation’s desired outcomes; the four parties being the stakeholder groups specified above.

Sometimes senior leaders want to use extended external coaching as a stimulus to deeper reflection about the firm or their role or as a catalyst to thinking “outside the box”. In such a case it might be difficult to plan specific outputs, although “generating more imaginative ideas about the future of the firm / how we should tackle X”, might fit the bill. In any event there needs to be some substantive answer to the question “why is this coaching happening?” so that it is not, in effect, just a perk or a status symbol.

- Set a budget of, say, three meetings and have a review before proceeding with any further coaching.
- Encourage all the stakeholders (coachee, coach, budget holder, business sponsor) to consider continuously if progress is being made. See the previous facing page for useful questions to be asking.
- HR (or L&D) and the business sponsor should provide on-going support to the coachee between coaching sessions. These meetings will allow communication from the individual about how the coaching is going.
- The coachee could provide updates on progress to the budget-holder or business sponsor. We do not advocate that the coach provide this report, as it risks compromising the important boundary of trust between the individual and the coach.
- Harvest the learning from coaching. Through the coaching process, coaches develop a deep understanding of the firm's leadership behaviour and culture. Panellists at CIPD's Coaching at Work Conference in 2006 agreed it is acceptable to harvest data on organisational themes. This needs to be done with due concern for the individual's confidentiality and it must be for constructive organisational feedback and never for punitive measures.
- In our experience, when HR departments bring external and internal coaches together to identify and document organisational themes that have emerged from their coaching, it both demonstrates the value of that coaching and provides information that enables the firm to be transformed.

...and finally

Yes we would like you to consider Sherwood when you are choosing potential coaches for your people or are trying to get the concept of coaching off the ground in your organisation.

We are very happy to talk to firms well before there is any actual coaching to do. Firms often feel they need help at the stage when partners (or senior management or line managers) are asking "what exactly is coaching?" and "how is it different from what we do already via training?" We can assist in the process of building credibility and confidence in the coaching process.

A vital first step in creating a successful coaching relationship is the "chemistry meeting" between individual and potential coach. We are always willing to invest time in these meetings.

The Sherwood coaching team hold relevant, recognised coaching qualifications - and have extensive practical experience. That experience covers both the skills of coaching and the culture of law firms and other professional service organisations.

Please get in touch – and if you do, thank you.

The Sherwood coaching team



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