

Executive Coaching Element – a note from Mary-Louise Clark, Lead Coach

The Executive Coaching interventions provide a style of learning and reflection which works in support of the more formal teaching elements of the programme. Following consultation with the Programme Directors, I, as Lead Coach, will match each participant with one of our team of professional Executive Coaches. Our team have many years' experience working with senior executives in both public and private sector organisations across the globe. A biography of your Executive Coach will be shared with you before you arrive in Oxford.

The coaching element is made up of two one to one sessions and one small group Peer Problem Solving session. These interventions are designed to offer a safe, confidential space for you to explore a development area or current challenge.

Coaching is a term which can have a wide variety of meanings so I thought it would be useful to briefly explain our approach so you will know what to expect. I understand that some of you have worked with a coach before and for some others this will be the first time. Here are a couple of definitions of coaching:

"From early forms of transportation...coaching literally means to transport someone from one place to another" (Starr, 2011, The Coaching Manual, Pearson Education Ltd)

"Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them" (Whitmore, 2009, Coaching for Performance: the Principles and Practices of Coaching and Leadership, Nicholas Brealey Publishing)

Executive coaching is different from both Mentoring and Counselling. International Coaching Federation members' definitions are as follows:

Coaching - focuses on setting goals, creating outcomes and managing personal change. Coaching is future focused.

Mentoring - a mentor is an expert (often from the same field) who provides advice, wisdom and guidance based on her or his own experience.

Counselling - an intervention which is often focused on resolving difficulties arising from the past which hamper an individual's emotional functioning in the present.

Executive coaching is a non-directive discipline built on the fundamental concept that the coachee (the person being coached) is best placed to understand themselves and their environment. The role of the coach is to challenge and support them to better understand their situation, make decisions and take actions to move forward.

Our coaching team may not be experts in your field (but they know that you are) however they are highly skilled in the art of quality questioning, listening and feedback. They work as facilitators with the aim of holding up a mirror, helping you reflect and utilising appropriate models and frameworks in order to open up your thinking.

Both the one to one and group sessions are structured conversations. Your coach will work with you in order to make best use of the time and ensure you come away with clear actions to take forward.

Please consider how you would like to spend your Executive Coaching sessions before you arrive in Oxford. There are no rules around the topics you bring to coaching – they can be macro or micro –something you have been dealing with for a long time or something new. Many coaching sessions have at their heart discussion around a leadership challenge.

The coaching team are very much looking forward to working with you.

Here are a couple of recommended books:

‘The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More & Change the Way You Lead Forever’ by Michael Stanier

‘Dare to Lead’ by Brene Brown

For those who may be interested in how to adapt the principles of Executive Coaching to specific culture contexts here is an interesting article by Lina and Ajay Nangalia about how Asian coaches have adapted the method.

<https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/file/cb7b963c-655d-430a-b13f-b001ed66dbdc/1/vol08issue1-paper-03.pdf>

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