

Adventure Coaching

Published in IS Opportunities magazine, March 2005

Adventure coaching takes your performance to new heights

Training doesn't work. That is the startling realisation that faces many companies today, as they seek greater returns on their investment in training and development programs. As with everything in business, we want to spend less, get more and have it right now.

We live in the Google generation, where people don't need to go on a training course to learn how to use new PC software – they play with it, and when they get stuck they press the F1 key. We don't need to be immersed in huge volumes of facts and figures – when we want an answer, we type the question into Google. We expect to learn when we need the information, not when the course is scheduled.

Coaching is an approach to learning that has been around for many years, yet is only recently becoming popular on a broader scale. Coaching is an approach to learning that is centred on the learner, and on helping them to unlock their own unique potential.

Coaching exists in many forms, from the life coaches you'll see advertising in your local newspaper through to business and executive coaches. One area of coaching that is relatively new is adventure coaching, which combines the best aspects of coaching, a physical challenge and time for relaxation and reflection.

In one adventure coaching weekend, the participants work on a specific goal, using Mount Snowdon in Wales to represent that goal. The physical challenge of climbing the mountain reveals all of their unconscious fear, doubt and disbelief which they can move beyond in order to explore their full potential.

Consider the possibility that you or your people already have all the knowledge they need to excel in their jobs. What is it that holds them back from achieving their full potential? Is it fear, or lack of motivation, or something else? Training will never help them, because there is nothing else they need to know – they simply need to get on with it. You know by now that incentives and punishments have very limited effect, and that the people who excel easily are the ones who simply love what they do. This is the difference that adventure coaching can make.

Are there any downsides to sending people on such an adventure? Coaching and personal development training certainly seems to attract two different kinds of people – those who want to be better at what they do, and those who really want to do something else. Spending a weekend examining your own dreams and motivations certainly does result in you 'getting off the fence' and committing to a course of action in life. Let's be honest – if there are people in your team who aren't fully committed to a life in sales, you already know that. Isn't it better that they make that decision and fully apply themselves to what they really want? In the long run, most sales managers agree they would rather risk losing a few people if it meant that the team as a whole became more focussed and committed.

It's important to realise that adventure coaching is very different to 'team building', where an entire team is taken out into a wet field and made to play a game involving barrels and ropes. Traditional team building does not work, and can have a detrimental effect on team spirit for a

very simple reason. The people involved are not a team. Let's take sales people as an example. Although they report to the same manager, they operate as individuals, perhaps even competing with each other in sales competitions and monthly rankings. It's not realistic to have these people working by themselves for 364 days each year, yet pulling together as a team for one day in a wet field near Wolverhampton. The different personalities and needs of the people involved will pull the team apart as the challenge exaggerates the dynamics of the team relationship.

An adventure coaching experience is a very different way to develop people on an individual basis. By working on their own goals, they develop the motivation and passion that will translate directly and immediately into increased performance. Some managers think that their staff should only focus on the company's goals, yet experience shows that if people cannot translate organisational goals into something more personal, they will fail to perform as expected.

At the end of an adventure coaching experience, the sense of collaboration and mutual support is immense, because individuals have explored what is important to themselves rather than being forced to work as a team. They develop relationships because they can – not because someone told them to.

You know, deep down, that sales targets, threats and the needs of the company do not motivate sales people. What makes anyone take action is personal reward, personal achievement and the knowledge that every action is building towards the future that you want for yourself. The job of the sales manager is to focus that into a coherent business plan. A corporate version of the Ascent experience uses the format to help management teams create business strategies that have a compelling and unified sense of purpose to them – something that you couldn't say about the mission statements of the last decade.

We're moving into an exciting time in the field of human development – a learning revolution. With the development opportunities that are available now, why be anything less than the best that you can be?



Peter Freeth is a leading business coach and author.

As Managing Director of Excellerate – a business coaching organisation – he brings a wealth of valuable experience gained from a diversity of industrial, commercial and lifestyle environments, which he employs to assist clients seeking to develop into effective leaders, as well as effective professionals.

Peter's latest book "NLP in Business" is available at all good bookshops.

© Peter Freeth 2006 www.ciauk.com info@ciauk.com