

"Coaches and coaching schools are popping up like mushrooms after the rain. It's estimated that somewhere between 60% and 90% of the Fortune 1000 use coaching in one form or another and according to a 2007 survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers it's at least a \$1.5 billion dollar industry."

OD and Coaching

Time to Get Serious

By Michael Bungay Stanier

Not your usual start...

Marshall McLuhan famously proclaimed, "The medium is the message." As this is an article on coaching, let me start by asking you a coaching question or two...

- » What do you want to get out of reading this article?
- » For what are you seeking confirmation?

Coaching is flourishing

If you've only just returned from a five-year solitary retreat you *might* have missed the rise of coaching. It's everywhere. *Harvard Business Review* praises it. It's a hot topic within ASTD and SHRM and the OD Network. And most tellingly, Dilbert and Jon Stewart mock it. Coaching has truly gone mainstream.

Coaches and coaching schools are popping up like mushrooms after the rain. It's estimated that somewhere between 60% and 90% of the Fortune 1000 use coaching in one form or another and according to a 2007 survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers it's at least a \$1.5 billion dollar industry. There are at least 271 coaching schools, and the International Coach Federation has 14,000 members from 80 different countries—and that number is growing.

That's good news for OD

Coaching—at its best—can be a powerful tool to bring to any OD engagement. It has roots that draw from a wide range of disciplines, from sciences (such as various

psychologies—clinical, positive, sports—and neuroscience), management training the personal development movement and even mythological structures such as Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey*.

Coaching an individual can increase their effectiveness within an organization, while also helping to grow their resilience, self-awareness and courage. It can ultimately make the recipient of coaching more self-sufficient and fulfilled.

As you might expect from its origins, coaching is also closely aligned with a number of core OD approaches. Appreciative Inquiry, Positive Deviance, process consulting and the fundamental rhythms of change are just some of the OD strategies that can quickstep well with coaching on the dance floor of transformation.

So, it would seem that it's all good. For the OD practitioner, coaching is an additional and powerful tool for supporting and encouraging change, furthermore a tool that's been largely embraced and seemingly understood by organizations. What's not to like?

But is coaching really working?

A 2006 study by Blessing White, "Coaching conundrum 2: The heart of coaching suggested that coaching might not be the "silver bullet", the all-conquering intervention that some would believe. From a survey of 677 managers (primarily from North America) it was found that less than a quarter felt that coaching contributed significantly to their performance. Over

CONFERENCE CONNECTION

Michael Bungay Stanier is a presenter at the 2008 OD Network Annual Conference in Austin at the following Pre-Conference Workshop:

Coaching and OD: Let's Get Serious

Saturday, October 18
9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

half of the respondents noted slight, little or no impact on their performance.

In some ways, this may be something of a relief to read. Numbers like that are familiar to anyone who works in the world of change management.

A 2007 Box of Crayons study supported that finding. It found that while coaching was largely accepted and expected within organizations, it rarely had the effects that it might, and there were a number of factors that appeared to consistently get in the way of coaching flourishing.

So what's stopping coaching from having the impact it might? After all, even though coaching's arrival into the mainstream means that it has lost some of its "new intervention sparkle" (the OD equivalent to the "new car smell"), it is still an intervention that for the most part is supported by people in private and public organizations. Surveys indicate that most managers would like to do more coaching.

The OD challenge

This state of coaching points to some basic questions we face as OD practitioners. Should I be using coaching in some way in the work I do? If so, how might I use it most powerfully? Where does coaching fit well with my current OD approaches? What are some of the benefits and the dangers in using coaching as part of an OD engagement?

This article offers up some grist for the mill. Its primary story is about the challenge of engaging managers and leaders as coaches within an organization. Around the edges of that story I'll also be suggesting questions that you as an external or internal OD practitioner might consider as you weigh up coaching and place it in the context of your current approaches to the work you do.

What's going wrong? (The rise and fall of coaching)

So what's stopping coaching from having the impact it might? After all, even though coaching's arrival into the mainstream means that it has lost some of its "new intervention sparkle" (the OD equivalent to the "new car smell"), it is still an intervention that for the most part is supported by people in private and public organizations. Surveys indicate that most managers would like to do more coaching.

The start of an answer lies in this

fictionalized and somewhat melodramatic version of how coaching gets introduced and embedded into an organization.

1. After 15 years "under the radar", coaching reaches a tipping point. It appears in enough journals and is mentioned at enough professional conferences to make it now OK for people to mention coaching without a). wondering if we're talking about a sports team or b). implying that you're a loser and failing at your work.
2. A few people in the organization start working with a coach. They have either hired them themselves or—more typically—someone else decided that this person could do with some help and are offering up the coach as a "nothing else was working and I'm too busy to do anything myself" tactic.
3. The coaching goes one of two ways. It may not have much effect—in which case it's written off as yet another HR/Californian touchy-feely trend and it then bubbles on in the organization in a low-key and ad hoc way.
4. Or alternatively, it does have some

What do you mean "coaching"?

"Coaching" has become one of those slippery terms that can mean almost anything to anyone. Here are a number of definitions—all true but none the truth.

Positive behaviour change (Marshall Goldsmith)

Training people to think differently (David Rock)

Working out what's important—and doing something about it.

A pause button, so people can step back from the busyness of it all, take a look around and get a new perspective.

impact. And then someone senior thinks: "Wow, that really helped. We should do more of that. Wouldn't it be good if we could do this throughout the company?"

5. At this stage, again, one of two things happens. Perhaps, enflamed and excited by the idea of coaching, a senior leader makes a general proclamation that "we're all coaches now" (with the subtext being: look how committed we are to our people). Managers are now expected to magically start coaching (without a very clear idea of what coaching is, why they'd do it, or how they could add it to their already overcrowded schedules).
6. Or alternatively, HR is called in and given their latest HR initiative: Create a coaching culture. And everyone else around the Senior Leadership table sits back and goes: "Excellent, it's in HR's hands now. We can relax."
7. HR folks are of course thrilled, because this is serious, culture-change stuff. And after a certain amount of thinking things through, they instigate the obvious approach: a "managers as coaches" training program.
8. The training then happens with mixed results. Some folk love it, some hate it and the majority think it's interesting enough—but not really practical. Everyone leaves the training and returns to the busyness of every day work, integrating a little of the training as best they can.
9. A year later the program finally runs out of steam—which is OK of course,

Three of the most powerful coaching questions

Asking great questions is the hallmark of a great coach. Here are three of my favorites:

1. What's working?

A nod to Appreciative Inquiry, this question changes the frame and the tone of a coaching conversation. It slows down the rush to fix, the rush to find the solution. And it reminds the person you're coaching just how much is actually working just fine.

2. If you say Yes to this, what are you saying No to?

My coaching is based on the existential notion that people are responsible for the choices they make—and that they're always making choices. What coaching does is to keep the responsibility for those choices with the person being coached—and to make the choices explicit. It's easy to say Yes, because it's only half the answer. Getting people to understand what the "No" is as well opens up a deeper understanding of what's really going on.

3. ... and what else?

Because a person's first answer is never their only answer and rarely their best answer. Because it keeps the person you're coaching doing the work. And because, if necessary, it buys you a little time to think of the next question.

because by then a new initiative (or three) to shift the company culture has already started...

So then, nothing new here. The experienced OD practitioner will recognize a number of familiar elements that bedevil any attempt to make change happen in an organization. And the truth is, successful change is always a combination of intent, hard work and a healthy dose of good luck.

Three tactics for making coaching work in organizations

Here then are three insights around the challenge of scaling and embedding coaching in an organization that, while not providing any magic solutions, may just increase your quotient of good luck.

1. Make it strategic

One of the most pervasive dangers of coaching is that it becomes an end in itself rather than a means to an end. As a result, I've grown deeply suspicious of the phrase "coaching culture" as it suggests that that's a useful target in and of itself.

Coach training typically only exacerbates this challenge. Most coach training takes place over a day or two and is provided by an external vendor. They have a coaching model to share and they introduce the model, train some core skills such as asking powerful questions and active listening, and do some practice.

What's lacking is often any context for the coaching. The most immediate challenge is to provide context to the manager as to how this fits with their day-to-day workload. As a manager, you want these questions answered:

- » How will this improve my effectiveness and impact with my team and those around me?
- » How does this support my quarterly and annual objectives?
- » How will my success at coaching (or not) be recognized and rewarded, if at all?
- » What should I stop doing so that I can start coaching?

At a different level, it's also critical for the coaching to be placed into the context of supporting a bigger business goal. Here are some examples of what this might look like:

- » With one client in the telecommunications industry, we worked with the managers of their frontline sales representatives. The specific challenge was to decrease the turnover of the representatives, something that was affecting both the company's bottom line and the individual manager's stress and compensation. We blended coach training, where the managers learned coaching skills framed around a way of increasing engagement and retention, with a process based on open space technology that looked at and solved specific challenges the sales managers faced, such as "funnel management."

- » For another client, a high profile non-profit organization, the challenge was a rebranding process. The small leadership team was concerned about employee and stakeholder reaction to the rebranding (and with it, a shift in strategic direction), particularly because many of these people were based in different countries. The coaching program was built in as an element of the larger rebranding process, with the specific goal of helping the leaders build resilience and maintain engagement.
- » And finally, for another client in the professional service sector, we worked with the most senior consultant group (all former "C-suite" players) to build more powerful client relationships, with coaching skills being part of the solution in better managing their workload, reducing burnout and increasing client retention.

The OD challenge

The challenge to be both strategic and practical is a constant one for OD practitioners. What current approaches do you use to keep your interventions strategic? What gets in the way of being strategic?

As an OD practitioner, these questions might be useful to consider. Thinking of a challenge you're currently working on...

- How might coaching add to or distract from the bigger strategic purpose?
 - If you were to include coaching as part of the intervention, what other possibilities would you be saying "no" to? What would the cost be of using coaching?
 - What would you gain from being a coach in this situation?
- "If we continue to invest in individuals as the primary target of change, we will spend our primary energy on this and never fully invest in communities. In this way, individual transformation comes at the cost of community."

Peter Block, *Community*

2. Address the resistance

The Institute for Corporate Productivity conducted a survey in 2007 of more than 300 organizations about the quality of their coaching and mentoring programs. Of the 50% of the survey respondents who actually had such a program in place, 82% believed that their programs were of average quality or below.

Part of the responsibility for that often lies with us, the champions of coaching. As advocates for coaching, our passion and belief that coaching is *A Good Thing*, and perhaps even *The Answer to Everything* can often blind us to a harsh reality...

Not everyone else is convinced.

If you imagine a bell curve, we're up at the front end—early adaptors, raving fans, passionate advocates. But as you travel back along the curve you run into people who are bemused then doubtful, skeptical then downright dismissive about coaching.

At the heart of this resistance is, I believe, fear. Being a coach for many people is a somewhat unnerving prospect. Here are five fears that managers might have about becoming coaches:

- ▷ I'm afraid that I don't know everything about the organization (and that this shortcoming will be revealed).
- ▷ I'm afraid that I won't have the answer to every question and that my lack of omniscience will be revealed.
- ▷ I'm afraid that I haven't myself reached a state of transcendent enlightenment and that my humanity will be revealed.
- ▷ I'm afraid I'll never master this and mastery is the only level that's acceptable.
- ▷ I'm afraid I'll get it wrong and that I'll damage the other person.

These fears remain unspoken. Which means the resistance to coaching as a tool also remains unacknowledged and unaddressed.

Any training on coaching skills needs to pay attention to the points of resistance. I often talk about "popping the balloon" of coaching, by which I mean reducing the weight and seriousness and self-importance with which coaching can arrive. Some of the insights about coaching that might help are:

- ▷ It is an additional management tool

NOT a replacement for your current management style.

- ▷ It requires you to have some powerful questions NOT to know all the answers.
- ▷ It requires you to be interested and curious in the other person NOT to have a PhD in psychology.
- ▷ It allows you to be yourself NOT to be an insane, head-nodding-to-show-I'm-actively-listening pseudo-therapist.

Perhaps the most liberating insight for people is this: Coaching doesn't have to be called coaching. You can call it anything you like or not call it anything at all. In many ways, it is just the latest label to describe what it means to have a conversation with another adult. My favourite sound bite for describing an adult-to-adult relationship is "asking for what you want ... knowing that the answer may be 'no'."

The OD challenge

Resistance is always part of the package when you work as an OD practitioner. The very nature of engaging with a system is to engage its homeostasis. What approaches do you already have for acknowledging that resistance? For working with resistance? For managing your own resilience in the face of resistance?

As an OD practitioner, these questions might be useful to consider. Thinking of a challenge you're currently working on...

- Where's the heart of resistance for the change you're committed to? How might coaching help with that—if at all?
- What might be the resistance to coaching? What might coaching surface or endanger?
- What are you resisting? What's the cost of that?

"The critical task of leadership is to protect space for the expression of people's doubts.... What is critical, and hard to live with, is that leaders do not have to respond to each person's doubts."

Peter Block, *Community*

Seven of the best

The market is flooded with coaching books—and with no end in sight.

If you're looking to deepen your knowledge and coaching skills, you could do worse than starting with these books.

Mary Beth O'Neill, *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*. O'Neill is particularly good on the importance of maintaining presence with your client and on the power of contracting with them to make expectations clear.

Ben Dean, *Positive Psychology Coaching*. Dean is one of the leading thinkers in the burgeoning area of positive psychology, and this book has practical tips on how to base a coaching relationship on what's positive. A great supplement to anyone with Appreciate Inquiry inclinations.

Laura Whitworth, et al. *Co-Active Coaching*. One of the classics in the field this sets out a coaching model and provides a bunch of practical tools including a list of great questions.

David Rock, *Quiet Leadership*. Since writing this book, Rock has continued to develop and explore the fascinating and important connection between coaching, leadership and neuroscience. His next book should be a classic.

Rick Carson, *Taming Your Gremlin*. The Gremlin is Carson's metaphor for the inner critic, that little voice that runs constantly in our heads whispering "you're going to get found out, who are you to think you could do this, you shouldn't do this..." A fun, fast and practical read to help shrink the influence of this little beast.

Kate Ludeman & Eddie Erlandson, *Coaching the Alpha Male*. Originally a *HBR* article, Ludeman got her chops from coaching Michael Dell (yes, that Michael Dell). A great framework for understanding how to coach someone driven for success.

Peter Block, *Community*. Peter Block's latest book is wonderful, provocative and wise. It asks the question about what conversations are required to build community, a place of engagement where people take responsibility for their freedom. Challenging for any myopic views on coaching.

As an OD professional looking to shift the way things are done in organizations, coaching can be a very powerful addition to your toolkit. Most obviously, it's a process or method for you to work with your clients in a way that is supporting, challenging and provocative, the embodiment of what Edgar Schein called "process consulting."

3. Abandon external role models

The pattern for how external coaches and their clients engage is fairly well established. On a regular basis (once a week/two weeks/monthly) the coach and the executive connect for an hour or so, either in person or over the phone. The time is pre-booked, a regularly occurring meeting that creates time and space for the executive to focus.

This is an excellent structure for an external coach. And a disastrous model to follow for the internal coach.

For coaching to flourish within an organization, to actually get into the warp and weft of the organizational fabric, coaching needs to:

- » Be a daily activity not (just) an occasional activity
- » Be part of the rhythm of everyday work not (just) be a special event.
- » Be a way of being with one another not (just) a formalized profession
- » Be a ten minute (or less) interaction not (just) a longer conversation
- » Be a shared responsibility not (just) the coach's bailiwick

In short, coaching must both fit within the culture as well as disrupt it, not be simply imposed upon it.

The OD challenge

Role models are both powerful and misleading. They can open up possibilities but also distract us from our own ability to decide what's most useful in our current situation.

As an OD practitioner, these questions might be useful to consider. Thinking of a challenge you're currently working on...

- What are the explicit and implicit assumptions you've made about coaching (what it is, what goal it serves, how it works)?
- What would be the most powerful relationship you could hold with your primary client? With the system? What would it look like?
- What story about coaching are you unwilling to abandon?

"Coaching is available to all of us and is not a profession but a way of being with each other."

Peter Block
private correspondence

Got Coaching?

In the dark distant past of the year 2000, Daniel Goleman of Emotional Intelligence fame published *Leadership That Gets Results* in *Harvard Business Review*. In it he suggested that there were six styles of leadership, each appropriate to different situations, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Typical leaders used one or two of these while really effective leaders could call on most or all of them as the circumstances dictated.

Coaching, one of the six, was shown to have particular influence on commitment, clarity and rewards—and a significant impact on the overall climate of an organization. Goleman notes, "Although the coaching style may not scream 'bottom-line result,' it delivers them." He also notes that coaching is the least used of the leadership styles.

Since then coaching has moved into the spotlight. It may or may not still be the least used of the leadership styles, but it is certainly no longer the most anonymous of them.

Michael Bungay Stanier, ILLB, is the Senior Partner of Box of Crayons a company that helps organizations do less Good Work and more Great Work. Their flagship training course is Coaching for Great Work. Michael has been an OD practitioner for 15 years, was the 2006 Canadian Coachee of the Year and a Rhodes Scholar. He graduated from the Australian National University with an LLB degree and later received a MA-Phil from Oxford University. Michael's latest book *Find Your Great Work* will be published in September. Michael can be reached at Michael@boxofcrayons.biz

As an OD professional looking to shift the way things are done in organizations, coaching can be a very powerful addition to your toolkit. Most obviously, it's a process or method for you to work with your clients in a way that is supporting, challenging and provocative, the embodiment of what Edgar Schein called "process consulting."

Even more powerful is to imagine how coaching can support, embed and enhance any of the change initiatives for which you are responsible. Indeed, one of the advantages we have as OD professionals is to bring a more strategic and systemic approach to how and where we use coaching, a perspective that helps coaching have the influence it could and should within organizations.

Not your usual finish...

Let me finish by asking you three coaching questions:

- » What was most useful about this article?
- » What do you want to remember?
- » What will you do differently as a result of this article?

The Conference Issue

1. From The Editor
Introducing OD Practitioner's New Associate Editor
2. Global Leadership: A Virgin Landscape for OD Practitioners in the Vanguard
8. Organizational Change through Powerful Micro-Level Interventions:
The Cape Cod Model
13. Action Learning: Using Reflection for Learning, Development, and Performance
Improvement
19. Strategic Change Consulting: How to Leverage Your Work at the Enterprise Level
24. Diversity Action Learning Teams: An Adaptable Methodology for Generating
Outcomes at Multiple Stages of an Organization's Life
31. Power Equity Group Theory: A Review for Practitioners
36. OD and Coaching: Time to Get Serious
41. What To Do When Your Organization Doesn't Have Time
44. Uncommon Beginnings, Common Threads: OD Practitioners in University Libraries
49. Making It On Your Own: Lessons Learned from One Solopreneur to Another