

An interview with an Executive Business Coach

PART ONE

Séamus - OK, Hi Cheryl, so then ... thank you for taking the call.

Cheryl - You're most welcome Séamus, happy to do this.

Séamus - OK good so can you tell us ah a little bit about coaching, exactly what is coaching?

Cheryl - So coaching is a, a collaborative conversation between two people to su... to have a sort of conversation that supports an individual to move forward in their life, on any goals, areas of focus where they may either feel that they are stuck or want a shift to or move forward. And the reason I call it a collaborative relationship is that coaching isn't something that you can do to someone, you can't say I'm going to coach you on this one. It, it is something that two people choose to have that conversation, so therefore it's always positive, because if it was the opposite of that, because if coaching was a negative, one person would just shrug their shoulders and just not participate. So the pieces that I think are in the definition of coaching are all about the collaborative, moving forward conversation, goal focused behavioural change, those sorts of things.

Séamus - OK great, so in that sense how is coaching different from therapy, from consulting, mentoring or counselling?

Cheryl - Sure there are some distinct differences and some might even say some similarities and that's interesting because I think you could take a coach approach in all of those areas that you have just mentioned but let's take them one by one, and if we start with counselling, someone has, a counsellor described it, it this way to me, it's very simplistic but it works for me, that counselling typically is about healing the past.

Séamus - Right

Cheryl - And coaching is about moving forward in your life.

Séamus - OK

Cheryl - So as a coach I'm not a counsellor so I'm not a professionally trained person that can deal with past issues and those sorts of things, a professional counsellor is best for that.

Séamus - Um hum

Cheryl - Same with therapist as well too. Now I understand that there are some forms of therapy that are of course, future focused but the majority and typically the reason that people go to that, is around some healing, some past hurts.

Séamus - Right OK and in terms of ah con ... ah ahm, mentoring and consulting?

Cheryl - So, so let's talk about mentoring then. Typically I choose a mentor, let's say I picked you as my mentor because you know something or are doing something that I want to know and do as well. You know...

Séamus - OK

Cheryl - You're more progressed in an area, you're you know, you have experience in an area so in that relationship it's often more about you than it is about me because it's about your experience, it's about your, the advice you're going to give me. So mentoring is typically all, typically more about you than it is about me. Now it could be as I mentioned earlier that you take a coach approach in the way that you mentor me, but you may not, you may just say, well, well here's what you need to do Cheryl in order to get where I am, to know what I know. So it tends to be directive and proscriptive.

Séamus - Ah, a a transmission of experience.

Cheryl - And I could probably out go, out grow your usefulness to me as a mentor because maybe I've moved on.

Séamus - Right, OK

Cheryl - Maybe I might move on beyond you, unlike the coaching relationship. And then the last one is ah, consulting. So if we, if we, consulting and mentoring have some similarities, there is some content expertise transfer so typically a consultant comes in and provides an information gap to a group or an organisation and may or may not be part of the integration and implementation of that infor .. information.

Séamus - OK

Cheryl - Now that's not to say that all of those roles wouldn't benefit from them shifting into a coach approach once they have done the mentoring or the consulting or whatever.

PART TWO

Séamus - So in that sense, why do people get a coach?

Cheryl - So the attraction for working with a coach I think brings us back to the definition of it 'cause we're looking for a collaborative partner to support us to reach a goal in our life. If we could do it all by ourself we probably would've done it all by ourself but we know that there would be value in working with someone else to accelerate how quickly we get to our goal, to challenge us, stretch us, take us places that we may not t .. take ourselves and also ahh support us to look at some of our stopping places. So as for an individual point of view, that's often why we see, why folks hire a, hire a coach, a different story inside organisations. Do you want me to ex ..explore that distinction?

Séamus - Yes, so exactly what does coaching have to, to offer the business community and business organisations?

Cheryl - Sure, so if I'm a business owner, I may choose for myself to hire a coach to support me ahh, to reach my goals, to grow the business, all of those things so I may hire an external coach to work with me. Senior leaders in organisations often find great value in working with a, a coach because as you've heard it said, it's very lonely at the top ...

Séamus - Uh Hum

Cheryl - ... and it's also very vulnerable, it's not a place where you can go and think with your mouth open with a peer because people expect you in a senior position to have thought through and resolved all of those sorts of issues. Right, within an organisation we are also supporting managers, leaders at all levels, from newly appointed supervisors right up to the top to learn coaching skills as part of their way of working with their employees on a day to day basis. Far more effective for a manager to use a coach approach in the communication rather than some of the methodologies we see used now.

Séamus - So when you talk about a coach approach in management and leadership could you ...

Cheryl - Um huh

Séamus - ... develop on that a little bit?

Cheryl - Sure can right. So if we think about a, a typical relationship between a boss employee as an example to ahh make our point here, often what we have is an employee need, has a problem, is stuck, needs help, goes to the manager, knock, knock on the door, hey boss what would you like me to do about this? Some managers take an approach of owning that problem almost

instantly and offering solutions to the employees, who leaves the conversation, goes back and goes into action. So the advantage of that manager taking a coach approach with their employees is that they could use those day to day conversations that are happening right now and all the time and use those to develop that person's capacity to make better decisions themselves, to support them in their own individual growth and development. All roads don't lead to the manager in order to make decisions because it narrows the bandwidth of decisions that can be made and it can also limit the creativity and new ideas if we're only accessing one person's ideas. And I have the belief that one of the responsibilities of leaders is to make more leaders and so by taking a coach approach in a way that managers work on a daily basis, what they are doing is developing the talent inside the organisation. So those are some of the benefits I see in having managers take a coach approach in the way that, that they work.

Séamus - Good, and would you say that part of effective management and leadership is not necessarily only a matter of doing, but also a matter of being.

Cheryl - Well yes there is, that's an interesting way to look at it that I completely agree with and I, I really would love to see a time where we had managers who had coaching in their bones such that it wasn't just a single event, they weren't just simply doing it, it was the way they were and all of us can bring to mind people who throughout their life, who just exuberated that naturalness of being coach-like when they communicate and it is so much more powerful. You know I often jokingly say to a group ahm, you know how many people here are pretty good at telling other what to do. Without exception pretty much all hands tend to go up because we are good at telling other people what to do. Some people think that's their job. And then I ask that same group, well how many people like to be told what to do?

Cheryl - And Séamus I rarely get a hand going up. So I say well let's just stop and think about what we have just done here. You don't like it and yet that's what you are doing with ah your direct reports. I wonder if I asked them the same questions if I'd get a different response. The chances are not. So if telling doesn't work, we've got to find ways to engage organisations. We're moving so quickly, we, we haven't got the time right now for us not to really tap into all the talent that is walking in the door every day.

Séamus - And you think coaching is the ahh thing to help with that?

Cheryl - Not only do I think it, I absolutely believe it and know it and see over and over again the success stories that have been coming back over the past few years when people say WOW, this really works. And so yes I absolutely believe that it's almost past a nice to have, I think it's a have to have as a skill set for all levels of managers in organisations.