

Coaching Mastery – Case Study Example 2 1000 words

January 2023

Introduction

Katie was referred to me for coaching from the organisation's central coaching pool. The initial message was that she wanted "leadership" coaching. So, I went into our initial introduction session not quite as clear about focus as I would have liked.

The Coachee

Katie is a very senior manager in the organisation, one step below director level and very well thought of. She manages several teams which perform well, despite significant challenges in this sector due to high demand and staff shortages.

Presenting Issues

Luckily Katie was very clear and articulate right from the start about her goals. She wanted help with "holding people to account" and "giving feedback". She stated that she was great at giving positive feedback, pointing out what her staff were good at and what they had achieved. However, if it involved a mistake or deficit, she found it near impossible to give this feedback.

Katie pointed out she was doing an MBA and wanted to put the ideas she was learning there into practice. Holding to account and feedback were part of her learning in that course. She said she had recognised an issue in the way she managed her staff.

Coaching Contract

We agreed 8 sessions, approximately every 3 to 4 weeks. We hoped to try find time to meet in person, but in the end all sessions were conducted online. We agreed the contract verbally as I felt we were both clear about parameters and process.

Initial Impression and Approach

I ended this first meeting wondering if she would become a 'pleasing coachee' just as she seemed to be a 'people pleasing' leader? Would I fall for that trap also? Who doesn't like a pleasing coachee?

My approach is to take each session as it arises, using the GROW model, as my basic guide. I hope for continuity between sessions, but remain flexible enough to 'go with the flow' if this is needed. With Katie, she remained focused on her initial goals throughout.

Coaching Process

In our first session proper, Katie described herself as "self-sufficient" and as "too empathic". She felt the latter could lead to being too unclear with her staff. They were perhaps not clear what she wanted. I wondered out loud if she was clear herself. We decided that work on both purpose and values would be really important for Katie. I asked her to find a list of values, circle the ones that 'spoke' to her. Then reduce it down to five and finally one. I asked her to sense check these with her friends and family. It was a good first session, but was it too good? Was she just pleasing me?

Katie kicked off the next session saying "Oh no, you are going to make me think and work!". She had done her 'homework' (of course!) and I wondered about her playful resistance. It was a bit flirtatious

and complementary while I found myself wanting to see more “bitter resistance”. Katie described her values as “generous heart”, but what emerged was that she only applied her generosity to the person right in front of her. The team, who might suffer that kindness, was forgotten to Katie in that moment. This seemed a critical insight and we worked on how she could apply her values in a sense systemically. We reflected on how she could keep the whole team ‘in her heart’ as she remained authentically true to her values. We ended the session doing a role play of how to give more critical feedback. Katie seemed to gain a significant amount from this practical approach and later gave feedback that she had put this into practice.

The next session was a struggle and I doubted its efficacy. Our online connection kept breaking down and in between I struggled to hear what Katie was saying. I felt myself getting drawn into a supervisory role, rather than a coaching stance. At the end I struggled to recall what we had discussed. It was intellectual and forced and I ended the session feeling like a useless coach.

“I feel like things are coming to an end with this”, Katie announced as we started our fourth session. She reported that she felt she had made good progress. She explained that she had reached out for coaching when she was going through a “low” period, with the team beset with HR issues, many of which she had attributed to her inability to hold to account. She felt much better now, the coaching had helped. I asked her for some concrete examples, which she was able to give and it was difficult not to agree that her approach had altered. I was however left with some niggling doubts. Was this some sort of ‘flight into competency’? Or were a few sessions all she really needed? I couldn’t escape thinking that I had not really got into the deeper issues. Did the online format get in the way? Had it been a convenient screen which blocked (screened off) our engaging in a deeper, more personal relationship?

Final Reflections

By all accounts Katie was happy with her coaching. She reported understanding herself better, being more steadfast in her values and applying them better across her entire team. I was left not so sure she had got the best of me or of coaching. I perhaps should have detected this “low” she only admitted later and explored that when it was happening. I had trusted her desire to get very practical, very quickly and it perhaps suited me in my coaching learning journey. It is difficult to see the coaching as unsuccessful and yet I can’t shake a feeling of missed opportunities. It is this paradoxical feeling which remains with me now.

(Wordcount 957)

1st marker (supervisor) comments (Jacqui Fairbrass)

A very useful self-critique of your coaching with Katie and a fabulous learning case study that also reflects your growth as a coach. Often those that we feel don’t go as well as they could give the greatest insights for coaching development.

You summarised her 4 sessions well and I got a great sense of your approach and your personal intuitive style. I love your questions to yourself about the impact and value she was taking away, and the niggling doubts you were having.

The apparent shorter than expected ending does suggest several things; she got what was needed in terms of change; she didn’t get what she needed as the questions / interventions didn’t match her goals and assumptions; she didn’t want to go on as you’d turned into her supervisor...also noting her

seniority 😊; she had assumed coaching was for times when one felt low...and no doubt others that you have identified.

I was noticing my own reflections on what her patterns might be and if her clear outcomes were being addressed in your approaches. I didn't get much of a sense of her in the case study – did you feel you got to know her well to create a trusted relationship. She may have been cautious with you. 'Voting with your feet' can also be a sure sign that the coaching may not be working for the coachee and this is the only way they can give you feedback. (That could be an interesting connection to her issues of giving negative feedback!).

I wonder too about any feedback you gave her in helping raise her own awareness (ie in addition to her insight of 'her team suffering her kindness') – were you able to reflect back any patterns? And I didn't get a sense of the effectiveness of your questioning or some other core coaching skills (I note the wordcount challenge) – ie rapport, questioning, listening and feedback and I wonder, with further reflection, if you perhaps did a bit more advice giving, or if your question approach was clear enough for her, if your pace matched hers etc. All may point to answer some of your niggling doubts.

I'd love to have heard a little more about the learning that you are taking away – what might you do differently in future? What additional approaches and interventions might you use in future. Would a personal narrative or some grounding approaches like a life wheel have helped at the start? Some of my comments reflect some ideas but there will be more that you'll have yourself. Perhaps you could reflect further on this in your reflective log.

Great work and a great challenge.

2nd marker comments (Anusha Parshotam)

Thank you – your honesty in your self critique is so valuable to you as you continue to develop further as a coach. You asked yourself some really useful and though provoking questions along the way, which will support your development. My only caution is that do not be too self critical – something that I had to learn as I developed too. Where we have high standards for ourselves, we can become too critical where sessions end abruptly or we might not feel like we are adding value. Coachees tend to get a lot of value from coaching even where as a coach we might feel we could have done more.

I would have liked to hear more about how you felt using the different tools and why you chose what you did (appreciate the word count limit). I agree with Jacqui, I would have love to hear more about what you might do differently going forward. I would also encourage you to think about how you can get coachees to really think about what they are bringing to coaching and the importance of their objectives early on. Questions like, why is this important to you right now? What impact will it have talking through it or not talking through it? How are you feeling about it now? This may help with bringing to the surface some feelings that might be underlying.

I also notice you said that her desire to get practical may have suited you in where you are in your coaching journey. That is a great reflection – what are you learning about yourself as a coach vs supervisor vs manager? What triggered you to step into more of a supervisor role? These reflections can really help to build your awareness of yourself in the sessions.

Well done and wish you well on your ongoing journey!