

## A discourse on coaching in the workplace

### Coaching in schools: the benefits, the challenges and how it can be achieved.

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I have spent the last 5 years in school developing and creating a coaching culture. There have been many challenges along the way, however I believe the benefits far outweigh these. We started in 2018 with a small group of staff who had been trained in digital coaching. These staff members were enthusiastic, however did not have the guidance or leadership to take the training further or establish meaningful connections through it. The understanding of coaching was through a digital lens and at that point the further applications of coaching had not been explored. There was no whole school direction, and many other members of staff had no understanding of coaching.

The biggest turning (or starting) point for us as a school was to have a Principal who championed coaching. I strongly believe that for any cultural change or initiative to be effective it has to be supported by your senior leadership team. The decisions to support funding, provide time, incorporate into a strategic plan etc sit (for most educational institutions) with a senior leadership team. Therefore, the passion and desire to support and develop any idea or culture needs to be there at that level.

We quickly realised the need to upskill our staff to understand coaching and its potential was vital if any progress was to be made. We took the enthusiasm from the staff who had been trained as digital coaches and invited them to train as professional coaches through the Culture at Work course. The course was a huge success, and many members of staff were very keen and enthusiastic to coach one another and other staff members.

However, we came across one of our first and most ongoing challenges of creating a coaching culture almost immediately. After a period of reflection, our newly trained coaches said that while they saw the value of coaching and wanted to continue, they were simply not able to fit coaching into their day-to-day schedules. 'Time' became our first and most enduring challenge: to provide time for coaching we needed to embed it in our schools infrastructure. As such, coaching was put onto our school strategic plan - this served to show its importance and enabled us to dedicate meeting time to coaching. It also enabled us to look at the long-term strategy of coaching at Nexus and how we wanted to continue to grow and develop the coaching culture.

We continued to train more staff as coaches and embedded coaching conversations in our appraisal process - further integrating coaching into our 'way of being'. We initially offered 1 coaching course a year; however, the courses became so popular that we had to start offering training twice a year. This served to show us the positive impact coaching was having. The 'corridor conversations' about coaching that people were having, were leading to more and more people being curious and wanting to be trained. We never mandated coaching training yet we had more people signing up than we could physically train - staff were talking positively about coaching.

As we embedded coaching through our meeting times, strategic plan, and appraisal process, we began to hear staff using the same language and we saw them turning up to meetings present and ready to listen. Our staff had become empowered to make their own decisions, and this was impacting their well-being in a positive way.

A new challenge we now faced was how to measure this positive impact. We wanted to be able to prove to others the power of coaching, but well-being and a feeling of empowerment

is very difficult to quantify. As part of our long-term strategy to embed coaching, we wanted to involve as many members of staff as possible. We held several Generative Thinking Meetings to understand the feelings around coaching and the direction the staff felt they wanted to take it. These meetings showed us that we still had staff in our school that did not understand coaching and possibly never would, and we had to make peace with this.

However, the meetings also evidenced a strong desire to start using coaching skills with our students, which was an exciting direction for coaching at Nexus. The benefits of coaching for students began to become very apparent as coaching skills were taken into the classroom and utilised across a range of applications, for example to set learning goals or understand University choices. Our empowered teachers were now empowering their students and giving them autonomy over the decisions they were making and their learning.

Now we are at the stage where coaching is well-established, and we continue to train new cohorts of staff every year. We talk about coaching at interviews - the training and choice to be coached has become a right and entitlement of working at Nexus. Coaching has become synonymous with our 'way of being', though we are under no illusion that this will just continue unless we continue to provide training, professional learning and support. The culture of an establishment lives and breathes, and in order to maintain a coaching culture we must continue to feed it.

Our next challenge will be to ensure the supervision of our coaches and the quality of the coaching that is being delivered. We also have dreams and aspirations of becoming a full coaching community, where parents can be invited in to be coached or trained and understand the power of coaching for themselves.

To conclude - I would not like to assume I can speak for all institutions. Outlined below are the challenges and benefits of coaching for us here at Nexus, and the things we have needed to be in place in order for us to grow and develop a coaching culture.

### **Challenges:**

- Time
- Supervision
- Quantifiable data

### **Benefits:**

- Empowerment
- Productivity
- Well-being
- A shared language and understanding
- An understanding of how to be present
- An expectation of how we treat one another
- Better conversations
- Growth Mindset

### **How:**

- Support from the senior leadership team
- Collaboration
- Time
- Professional learning
- Long-term strategy
- Passion