

Coaching: Bringing your ethics to work

Coaching can be an effective way of helping you to understand what ethical working means for you. **Alison Clayton-Smith** finds out more.

Acting with integrity in the workplace 'starts with yourself and the extent to which you're treating yourself ethically,' says Pauline Esson of With Integrity Coaching. The challenge of ethical working can come in many guises from whether to use work envelopes for personal post through to the kind of organisation you want to work for. Coaching can be an effective way of helping you to understand what ethical working means for you and how to make it happen.

What is coaching?

Coaching, in simple terms, is a conversation with someone who helps you explore your issue or goal and come to a conclusion. Critically, a coach is there predominantly to guide and challenge, not to tell you what to do. If you come up with the plan, you own it and you're more likely to stick to it. Coaching often gets confused with counselling. One way of distinguishing them is that coaching focuses on developing goals and actions, whereas counselling tends to go into deeper psychological and historical problems.

Many employers offer coaching to staff as part of their development, whether through external coaches or via trained

colleagues. If your employer doesn't provide coaching, or you're self-employed, you can pay to see someone privately.

How can coaching help

Elizabeth McManus of Development Alternatives says that 'Coaching can help clarify boundaries of what's acceptable to the individual and what their ethical deal-breakers are. Sometimes the resulting clarity means they leave the organisation. Coaching can help make this a positive, planned change rather than a knee jerk response. It can also help someone think through a plan for how to raise a sensitive issue, like whistle-blowing, in a way that combines honesty and integrity with a degree of self-protection. And anyone can lead and influence by example on ethical matters if their impact is strong enough. Coaching can help identify what kind of example someone is trying to set and how they can best do it in the real context of their job.'

Periods of change

Neil Mitchell, of Neil Mitchell & Associates, has helped several people through periods of change. Chris, a mid-career solicitor, came to Neil as part of



a coaching programme offered by his employer. He'd become increasingly uncomfortable about the nature of his work, which involved defending fraud claims against insurers. He was finding that his complex technical arguments were wrongly able to absolve the insurers of any liability and on more than one occasion, vulnerable individuals incurred heavy losses.

Chris has been using the coaching to explore what he wants in his next job. He now knows the difference between what he really needs and what he wants in a career. Also, he's the expert in the firm on this area of law and he felt uncomfortable about leaving the firm in the lurch. So, Neil has helped Chris to develop a mid-term exit strategy that includes developing someone else into the role he's been doing.

Identifying goals

Martin has had a successful career in procurement, working up to director-level. He was approached to join a start-up company as a director, which would include an equity share with the potential for earning huge amounts of money in 5-10 years time. He was very excited and flattered by the offer but he also felt guilty about earning more money when he could see others struggling with poverty. He decided to have some coaching with Jo Smith of Goalgetter.

Jo helped Martin to identify four potential ways forward. He chose to take the job and now gives a percentage of everything he earns to where he sees a need. The more his income increases the more money he gives. Martin sees this as a real opportunity for philanthropy, whilst also making sure that he doesn't make any

unrealistic commitments. He feels that coaching helped him to make informed choices and to make the best decision for him.

Solving dilemmas

Kal is a senior retail manager. She's always had great results and gets her drive for work from developing people and seeing them thrive. Her big dilemma came when she moved to a role at a new site with lots of difficulties, including serious health and safety issues. Suddenly, she seriously doubted her ability to do the job the way she wanted. The company, focused on profits and targets, wanted headcount cuts. She could see other ways of managing costs that would allow her to keep supporting her team but she didn't feel the company would listen.

The coaching sessions with Pauline Esson led Kal to review her personal finances. She identified that she could cope financially if she chose to walk away from her job or was sacked for not doing what was expected of her. That knowledge gave her the freedom to act in a way which fitted with her values.

Coaching and the environment

A pilot project is just starting which will use coaching to help small businesses save energy and cut emissions. Mike Page, of the University of Hertfordshire, is drawing on a well-established set of techniques called Fit Science. To date these techniques have been used to create behaviour change, mainly around health issues.

The initiative involves conducting an energy survey with a business and then using coaching to create behavioural change through. For example, the coaching sessions will challenge

any 'can't dos' and 'won't dos', encouraging the person to think creatively and flexibly. The project is running in the East of England over the next 3 years and it will be fascinating to see to what extent coaching can support new environmental practices.

Where to now?

These examples demonstrate that coaching has a valuable part to play in bringing ethics into work. Having the space to work through ethical dilemmas, big or small, with a supportive and challenging coach can be particularly helpful when it seems there are no easy answers. If you think coaching might help you with an issue, ask your employer if they provide coaching. If not, or if you're self-employed, consider finding a coach yourself. Most coaches will offer a 'chemistry' meeting free of charge, so you can check them out first. 

Useful contacts:

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Association for Coaching

Tel: 01204 691 843

associationforcoaching.com

With Integrity Coaching

Tel: 01462 484 936

withintegrity.co.uk

Corporate Fit Science

Tel: 08458 387 380

www.corporatefitscience.com

Development Alternatives

Tel: 01204 691 843

www.development-alternatives.co.uk

Goalgetter

Tel: 07877 486 129

www.goalgetter.org.uk

Neil Mitchell & Associates

Tel: 07968 696 041

www.neilmitchell.co.uk