

Coaching can be used to help clients in a variety of different scenarios. The Health Services Journal commissioned me to write a series of short articles describing my work with an existing client and brief coaching interventions with individuals who asked for support through their "Working Lives" series. The articles appeared in 2008.

ARTICLE 1:

Background and context

Dr AB is a GP working in a large and busy North London practice. The practice decided a few years ago to have a managing partner and Dr AB is the second partner to take on this role. I first met AB not long before she was due to take on the managing partner role and her colleague partners suggested she seek a coach. Quite soon after I ran a strategy day for the practice and this was a good way to begin to understand some the issues she was facing.

A says "I was keen to take on the role but very mindful of the challenges. How would I lead my peers? How would the staff respond to a change as my style is quite different from the first managing partner? What did I really want to achieve in my first few months? How would I manage my time differently? I have had previous leadership roles but in an entirely different setting so what kind of leader was I going to be? In selecting a coach I wanted someone with knowledge of the NHS who could challenge me in a safe environment, to help work things through."

Starting out

When A and I had our first one to one session it was clear that she was very confident about what the practice culture and ethos are but less clear about what her contribution might be in the coming 3 years. We agreed that a first task would be to work out a starting strategy-how would she begin to make the transition from being one of the partners to the managing partner? How would she agree her goals with the other partners and sell them to the staff?

We worked through a brainstorming session about the initiatives the practice was involved with and began to pull out which A had to lead and which 'belonged' to the other partners. We then began to build a first month plan followed by a first quarter plan and then a first year plan. This helped A work out how much she needed to reduce her clinical commitments and also think about what support she needed within the practice. Part of this work was informed by the writing of William Bridges

on Transition¹ a model which is very useful in coaching situations where clients move roles.

Some of the challenges

In order to support A with her first question "How will I lead my peers?" she agreed to complete a Myers Brigs profile (MBTI). We used this to get her to think about how she prefers to work and then how her colleagues prefer to work. In realising that one partner likes to know the detail she came up with a specific strategy for working with him that means he has come to trust her more. In addition A says understanding her preferences has led to her "*reflecting more before I speak and thinking more about others preferences for the way they work.*" As part of this session I worked on dealing with limiting assumptions-for many of us these get in the way of success. For example I would say "What are you assuming might happen if you challenge your colleagues about the future direction of the practice?" On the basis of the responses we would work out a suggested handling strategy that A would then try out.

On one occasion she had to deal with a patient complaint that turned into issue about record keeping by a GP colleague who had previously worked on a single handed basis. At a coaching session we worked together on how she would approach this individual and what audit measures she would put in place. Clearly this was an uncomfortable issue-dealing with a peer, but A recognised that as the managing partner she had to be firm but fair in her handling but also explicit about expected performance standards. On reflection she said "*I realised then that as a leader you can't always be liked, no matter what your personal needs are!*"

Reflections

I have worked with A for some months now and her confidence as a leader has grown. We agreed early on to meet away from the practice and this has really helped A focus. She says what has been most useful for her is

- *"having a coach with an outside perspective,*
- *private space to think ahead,*
- *encouragement to try out different ways of doing things*
- *knowing that everything is confidential as sometimes it's hard to split our personal and work lives."*

¹ **Bridges W (2004)** Transitions-making sense of life's changes (2nd Edition)