

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 3

Background and context

I was approached by B, a manager working in a multi-agency pilot assessing children with complex needs and their families across health and social care as a result of the Working Lives series on coaching. I had a lengthy initial telephone conversation with her and we then had two telephone coaching sessions about three weeks apart as well as a final top-up call just before an interview. B originally trained as a nurse and health visitor and has participated in an array of further development culminating in an MA in Healthcare and Leadership, which she found particularly challenging.

Starting out

During both our introductory conversation and our first session B expressed a high level of frustration with her current post and particularly still being regarded as "*a health person in a social care environment*". B indicated that her self esteem was being eroded partly because of being constantly bounced between agencies but also because of changes in her personal life, including her second child recently going off to university. She described some recent examples of her work not being valued by social care colleagues and then went on to describe herself as "*at a crossroads...I need to think about moving on but don't know what next.*"

Some of issues

Both during the initial conversation and the subsequent calls B presented as a very talkative and slightly unfocussed person. To help manage this I sent her an exercise to do between the first two sessions and she usefully used this with her supervisor to help focus her future actions and especially where she might concentrate her energy. I often find in coaching that thinking about where one likes to focus ones energy or indeed realising what one is really passionate about, is the key to helping someone unlock themselves from an impasse. In this case B

had decided that the best solution to the frustration was to seek a new position that would allow her to maintain her pension but give her a more clearly defined challenge in the local implementation of a national initiative.

Some of our further work was around unpicking the job and person specification to help B understand what research she needed to do, how to see what of her current knowledge/skills was transferrable and also how to target her personal statement. Given that B was feeling low in confidence and had been described by her manager as "*too discursive*" producing a focused, relevant and self-promoting statement was quite a challenge.

We jointly worked through several iterations which included work with B to encourage reflection on her achievements and core competences. B succeeded in getting on to the shortlist.

The final bit of the jigsaw was a telephone coaching session the morning of the interview. This included getting B to focus on her breathing, encouraging her to take time to respond to questions instead of jumping in with the first thought and to work out how best to position herself to do a successful presentation. B herself had done a lot of preparation but there was a danger we recognised in her getting too immersed in the detail and not allowing herself enough airtime to convince the panel of her suitability for the role.

Readers will want to know: yes she got the job!

Reflections

As a coach I found working with B quite challenging-partly because of her style and partly because I felt she was someone who probably could have benefitted from face to face coaching and the administration/exploration of an instrument like the Myers Briggs Type Indicator™. Nonetheless B enjoyed the coaching and said "*I feel I wouldn't have had the confidence to apply for and get the new role without this support.*" This case study shows how the presenting issue can often turn into something quite different and also how short focused interventions can be highly effective with some individuals. I would recommend here though that B has further coaching sessions to help her make the transition into the new role and to help embed different behaviour that might stop her getting to such a frustrating position in the future.