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*"promoting excellence & ethics in coaching"*

## BUILDING A COACHING CULTURE IN NATIONAL EXPRESS

HOW DO YOU BUILD A COACHING CULTURE IN A FAST-MOVING OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT? NATIONAL EXPRESS HR DIRECTOR JENIFER RICHMOND AND NOTION MANAGING DIRECTOR DOMINIC ASHLEY-TIMMS TALK TO DEPUTY EDITOR SUE STOCKDALE.

'What do you think we should do?' is a question you are likely to hear managers at National Express asking their people, because they wholeheartedly believe that if they can unlock the talent of their employees, everyone can add more value.

Asking questions is now a key part of the coaching culture, according to Jenifer Richmond, HR Director at National Express, the intercity coach operator providing services throughout England, Scotland and Wales. She observes that when people are able to solve their own issues and operate in an organisation that helps people to learn, it increases headspace for leaders and managers to be more strategic. In other words, a coaching culture helps everyone to lift their capability. Describing the environment in National Express today, Jenifer reflects 'If you were to walk around the organisation, you would hear managers coaching "in the moment" by asking open questions and helping people to expand their thinking to address current issues. It has made a real and positive difference to the level of engagement and motivation.'

There have also been financial benefits as a result of creating a coaching culture. One striking example was in a coaching session where an employee was thinking about an issue he faced in Victoria Coach Station in London. One of the ticket machines was set to only take credit cards as there was no safe way to empty it of cash every day. Through his coaching, he came up with a solution to the issue, which resulted

in increased revenue of over £250,000 for the company. This, and other examples, contributed to an early 4.8 times return on investment (ROI) identified by National Express.

Notion's Managing Director, Dominic Ashley-Timms, whose company worked with National Express to help establish their coaching culture, also believes that any organisation looking to introduce coaching into their business should be clear about what they expect that effort to deliver. 'Too often,' he says, 'businesses fail to capitalise on their investment in coaching, which means that it isn't sustainable. Often this is because they haven't thought through their coaching strategy or identified the KPIs that would need to improve in order to evidence the value contribution from coaching.'

He continues 'When we worked with National Express, it was impressive to see their commitment from a senior management level, as well as the hard work that Jenifer Richmond put in to their selection criteria for internal coaches. People weren't just selected, but invited to apply. We know from our work with other organisations that clear criteria and standards for selection of both internal and external coaches is vital to the success of a coaching culture.'

Notion have identified ten factors critical for success in establishing a coaching culture, and National Express have put them all into practice.

*(See following page.)*



### TEN STEPS TO CREATING A COACHING CULTURE

- 1 Link coaching to the business strategy
- 2 Identify a senior sponsor, ideally a member of the board
- 3 Clarify what you mean by 'a coaching culture' for your organisation – create a common language
- 4 Integrate coaching modules into the leadership programme and encourage leaders to be positive role models in coaching others
- 5 Develop evaluation strategies to measure return on investment so that you can prove it works
- 6 Start coaching at the top of the organisation
- 7 Define quality criteria and standards for coach selection (internal and external coaches)
- 8 Create a coaching pool, so that a choice of coaches can be provided
- 9 Make 'operational' coaching skills training available across the organisation
- 10 Develop an integrated communication plan to share coaching successes

### STARTING THE JOURNEY

Having initially participated in a coaching skills programme run by Notion, Jenifer sensed that coaching could add value and deliver real results within National Express. She was impressed with the capability of Notion's coaching team as well as their strong business focus and quality of training materials. So, using their expertise and support, she set out to convince the National Express board to make the investment required to build a coaching culture.

Jenifer had already begun the process of influencing board members, coaching some of them as 'practice coachees' to complete her coaching qualification. Once they had experienced the benefits of coaching first hand, they became advocates. Jenifer also spent time influencing the other directors outside the boardroom, garnering their support as well.

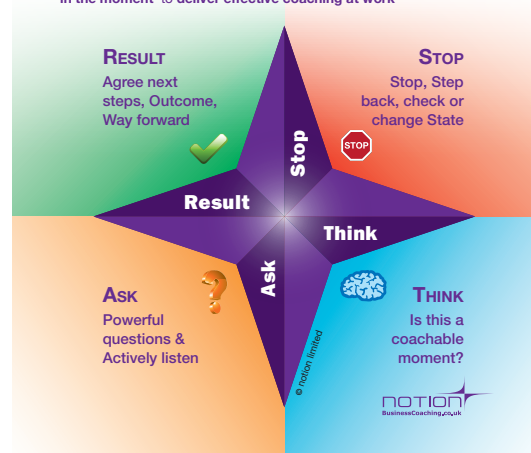
### INTEGRATING AND EMBEDDING THE CULTURE

Having gained the go-ahead, five internal coaches were trained up as accredited coaches, and 135 managers trained in coaching skills in the first year. A further 100 managers were trained in year two following this initial cadre, which provided widespread coverage of coaching skills across the business. One of the most practical coaching models managers were introduced to was Notion's STAR™ model, an operational coaching approach developed by Notion to enable coaching to be delivered 'in the moment.' (See image top right.)

'Notion's STAR™ model enabled managers to change their existing behaviour from telling to asking – in real time,' says Jenifer Richmond. 'When they stop and think, and choose a different outcome, it can make a positive difference. Using the STAR™ model, alongside

### Notion's STAR Coaching Model™

A simple, 4-step operational coaching model that you can use 'in the moment' to deliver effective coaching at work



John Whitmore's GROW model, gave our managers practical tools that they could apply immediately back at work.'

Another factor that enabled National Express to integrate the coaching experience was supervised coaching circles for the managers to attend. These were held four and eight weeks after the training programme, and enabled managers to share how they had applied coaching skills in their day-to-day work, and to continue to practise using the skills with one another on live issues. Coaching circles were also included as part of the Senior Managers' conference held later in the year.

The effectiveness of the coaching culture at National Express was also noticed by another supplier providing equipment to National Express. Typically the supplier would train NE managers in the coaching skills necessary to



help others utilise the information generated by their equipment. However, having observed National Express managers at work, the supplier recognised that no additional training would be required, thanks to the high level of coaching skills already being demonstrated.

Coaching is now integrated into key business processes, and is also a part of the day-to-day language that is used around the business and in talent reviews. The Executive Team also has external coaches, and coaching is now viewed as a priority and a privilege, rather than a remedial solution. There has been a really positive response from the managers that were trained in coaching skills. One of them commented 'Coaching has been the key to unlocking potential in my team.' Another reflected 'I thought I knew what coaching was, but now I really feel equipped to use my skills.' All in all, the steps taken to build a sustainable coaching culture have proved to be a success not only in terms of engagement, but also in bottom line business results.

#### KEY LEARNING FROM NATIONAL EXPRESS HR DIRECTOR

- Make sure you source a strong external provider to support the building of a coaching culture.
- It can take effort to get the Executive Team on board and committed, but it will be worth it.
- Don't forget to make sure you also gain buy-in at the next level down in the organisation.
- When setting up an internal coaching practice, pay careful attention to selection criteria of the coaches, and the structure that is created to support them.
- Train the internal coaches to gain a recognised coaching qualification, and invest in their CPD and formal Supervision. National Express used ILM7 Executive Coaching and Mentoring as the benchmark.
- Communicating successes is vital in order to help others become aware of the impact that the coaching culture is having on the business.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jenifer Richmond is HR Director, National Express. With over 13 years' experience at Director level in HR and Change across three services organisations, Jenifer has recently started her own Executive Coaching business on a part-time basis whilst working four days a week for National Express. Jenifer acts as a true business partner to senior leaders and executive teams, facilitating strategy development and deployment, coaching executives, and delivering innovative and pragmatic solutions that have real impact and deliver value.



Dominic Ashley-Timms is Managing Director of Notion Ltd. ([businesscoaching.co.uk](http://businesscoaching.co.uk)) Formerly as a Change consultant and latterly as an Executive Coach, Dominic specialises in the human side of change. Established in 2000, Notion is a specialist international provider of all coaching-related services, working with organisations to help realise their investment in coaching and build sustainable coaching cultures. Strategically, Dominic works with Leadership Teams to introduce them to the organisational benefits of coaching and to help define their coaching strategy and outcomes.



Sue Stockdale is an executive coach and coach supervisor. She is Deputy Editor of *Global Coaching Perspectives*, and has written eight books including *Cope with Change at Work*, *The Personality Workbook* and her most recent title *Risk: All that Matters*.