

Notion White Paper 17.1:

Building A Coaching Culture

7 Ideas to help Build a **Sustainable Coaching Culture**



Introduction

As the modern workplace environment continues to change at pace, the need for a more enlightened approach to management has never been more urgent. No longer will people put up with the traditional, desk-thumping 'command and tell' before packing their bags and moving on - instead, retention has become the focus for most employers. And with that focus, comes the need to engage people differently (so that they'll stay for longer than the projected average of less than two years for Millennials).

With Executive Coaches now ten-a-penny, often with no better qualification or recommendation than being a "friend-of-a-friend" or an "old associate", and organisations rightfully confused about how to bring coaching into their business and whether and how to build an internal coaching culture, this paper offers a refreshing viewpoint on how to begin to build a sustainable coaching culture and how you can be sure that your investment in this area will deliver a meaningful ROI and a long-term change for the positive within your organisation.

Notion, a specialist company with deep skills in all things to do with coaching inside organisations, provides an alternative to the traditional top-heavy, short-term approach of providing a few external executive coaches to a select elite. Instead they advocate that by establishing a more inclusive coaching culture within an organisation, a wealth of long-term benefits and a measurable ROI can be set up across the whole of your business.

By following Notion's seven top tips for establishing a coaching culture, you too can begin to generate the wealth of benefits that Notion regularly experience with their clients from showing Leaders and Managers how to begin to adopt more of a coaching style in their everyday interactions.

Establishing a sustainable coaching culture will help to:



Increase productivity



Increase engagement across the organisation



Establish a more proactive workforce

1

Be inclusive

The focus of a coaching culture is on finding a way of tapping into the potential of all people within an organisation. Instead of forcing changes upon staff in the name of progress, by taking what Notion have dubbed an 'Operational Coaching' approach towards establish a coaching culture, you are inviting everyone in the organisation – at every level – to step up and give more; to begin to maximise their potential.

It is well documented that employees are happier and thus more productive when they feel listened to and recognised for their contribution to the organisation. Operational Coaching works within the environment and beliefs of a business to ensure that everyone feels valued for their contribution and able to discuss this in an open and listening environment. Understanding how to ask better questions is also vital to establishing a successful coaching culture, with a swift benefit of reducing or even eliminating a culture of blame.

Establishing the kind of culture where the predominant behaviour is focused more around **helping people to think for themselves** rather than telling them what to do can also help an organisation to embrace diversity by making it easier to work with colleagues from a range of different backgrounds, environments, and cultures.



Helping people to think for themselves

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Positive projection from Leaders

The Captains of Industry (or the Leadership Team to you and me) can often be regarded as a group of mercenaries rather than a team, assembled for their particular skills and often with competing commitments during their tenure; what the organisation truly needs, compared with what they need to achieve personally to maximise their reward package.

Notion believes that the next captain should come from the crew for maximum organisational stability, and a key role of any Business Leader therefore should be to invest in both the talent pipeline as well as their succession development, preparing the next in line to take on the mantle of leadership. By role modelling an operational coaching approach themselves, the leadership team can build up and model their ideas with the next level of management thus spreading the benefits of an emerging coaching culture by encouraging their direct reports to behave similarly.

Leaders should project a positive role model with the purpose of operational coaching clearly articulated and linked directly to supporting the core business strategy.

Ideally, the desire to create a Coaching Culture should have a clear sponsor who is highly thought-of within the organisation and Senior Managers in the organisation should be seen to embrace and promote coaching themselves.



Leaders should project a positive role model

Identifying your ROI indicators

To support the sustainability of any effort to promote the establishment of a coaching culture, it's important to select a small number of metrics that matter to the Senior Management that can actually be positively influenced and that are in alignment with the organisational strategy.

Linking their day-to-day coaching with the situations that would support a movement in those metrics is a key to enabling people to use their newly learned skills when related opportunities present themselves.

In this way, the careful establishment of a coaching culture will generate a noticeable ROI that can be measured and tangibly evidenced.

A few typical metrics might include any of the following and need not necessarily all be financial:

- An increase in productivity
- An increase in sales
- Improving engagement across the workforce (as measured in employee surveys) and creating a more proactive workforce
- Leveraging employee and team performance
- More internal promotions from a more competent and confident internal talent pool
- Better relationships with suppliers and/or unions to create a "win/win" culture

Some examples of immediate benefits noted by organisations that Notion have worked with directly to build an operational coaching culture include:

"It allowed me to get the most out of a talented, eager but inexperienced graduate. The completed project probably saved us c£50-£100k. The ongoing benefits to the business are unquantifiable."

"The supplier. . .couldn't understand the impact they have on our operations if the service goes wrong. By taking a coaching approach we stopped the email tennis and we now meet face to face to resolve issues at monthly intervals. I am adopting the approach to help support a win-win culture."

Asking more powerful questions enabled a "quicker delivery of a project into the business. Once fully embedded it is worth £1m per annum savings."

"Working with the Operations Team helping them solve their own issues relating to labour management has saved £4m year to date"

"Halved annual sickness rate, saving around £2,000 in shift cover"

"Many small and large operational efficiencies have been realised with estimated +£2m savings."

In addition finding a way to share these smaller wins generates momentum and also helps people to develop more of an 'ROI mindset' - they begin to 'tune-in' to the impact that they can have just by utilising more of a questioning style of management. It's when these benefits begin to accumulate that the headline metrics begin to move.

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Creating an audible noise

Key to the development of a successful coaching culture is the generation of an audible 'noise' which the rest of the organisation will notice. You can't be shy about introducing a new way of engaging people within the business if you want to have this become 'the way we work around here'.

Encouraging leaders and management teams to talk about coaching (openly referencing good coaching conversations that they've experienced for example), asking others about how they're using the tools and which circumstances do they find 'coaching conversations' to be the most helpful, all make the language of a coaching culture common parlance within the organisation.

Reporting on the positive movement in the ROI indicators and communicating that more widely to the organisations can also help to generate internal demand for operational coaching within other parts of the organisation.



You can't be shy about introducing a new way of engaging people within the business

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Organic HR initiatives

Most HR initiatives are launched upon or done to an organisation, whilst in fact those that are organic have the greatest longevity and success. Rather than being seen as just another HR initiative, having the business itself 'own' the building of a sustainable coaching culture relies on the carefully thought through management of some key symbols of change and a subtle background of internal communications to help with that all-important step of making operational coaching part of the everyday language of an organisation.

Rather than being seen as an external force that's implementing change on an organisation, Notion's Operational Coaching Model can be owned quickly and 'pulled in' by the business, fully adapted to suit the needs of different organisations.

Key to establishing a sustainable coaching culture is the normalisation of those behaviours within the organisation, and other forms of communication have their part to play in raising the 'background noise' as well. A well-timed but not splashy article in a company's internal magazine or newsletter, supported by commentary and some 'good news' stories from different parts of the business and communicated through a variety of channels, can all contribute to a small rise in the volume of that 'background noise' helping to normalise coaching activity.



Notion's Operational Coaching Model can be owned quickly and 'pulled in' by the business

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Coaching culture must flow all ways

Operational Coaching is not a top-down approach. Instead, coaching should flow in all directions – up, down, and laterally across the organisation. Using at its core a much more collaborative style of engagement, making it alright to ask challenging questions can contribute to significantly improved solutions as teams reflect more deeply. Managers and team members are also better placed to “manage upwards” by asking more appropriate and insightful questions.

For this to be successful, clear feedback channels need to be established or expanded, with strong attempts made to understand and take on board positive and negative feedback, and to respond appropriately.

By implementing “after action” reviews, both teams and individuals are able to learn more continuously and fluidly within the organisation.



Clear feedback channels need to be established or expanded

7

Coaching culture must become a core part of your organisation

Whereas the HR and L&D can often (unfairly) be regarded as an adjunct to the key business process of an organisation, implementing a coaching culture can help to foster a much closer alignment of these important functions as they become central to helping sustain the very real returns to the business that a change in management culture can generate.

The availability of continuous learning and development across an organisation is an essential part of establishing a coaching culture. As well as training people in the Operational Coaching skills that they need, Notion also help client organisations to think through the structures that will need to be in place to support more formal internal coaching, and how this and wider coaching activity can be measured and a clear ROI demonstrated, again with clear links to the core business strategy.

And, it need not be only the internal performance that benefits from the developing coaching culture; Notion often sees that the quality of customer interactions improve as well. As for individuals, the resilience that can grow from the habit of continually asking a better question can help them to overcome difficult circumstances or challenging relationships with far reaching benefits.



Continuous learning and development across an organisation is an essential part of establishing a coaching culture

Conclusion

Committing to beginning the journey of building a Coaching Culture inside your organisation that embraces an inclusive operational coaching approach, requires thoughtful planning, a clear and well-respected sponsor within an organisation and considered communication. Ideally, Senior Managers should role model their intentions to their direct reports in a way that encourages wider adoption and this should be visible to the organisation.

Making the language of a coaching culture common parlance within the organisation, and highlighting performance improvements and changes in ROI can stimulate internal demand from other parts of the organisation contributing to the business 'owning' the development of a wider coaching culture rather than it being regarded as an HR or L&D initiative.

To be successful, coaching culture must flow up, down, and across the whole of the business, and should be tied to core business strategy, resting firmly at the heart of the organisation in an environment of ongoing and continued coaching skills and continuing professional development training.



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Authors: Notion are narrow and deep in the application of coaching skills and behaviours and how they can be applied sustainably inside organisations. They currently partner with a number of FTSE 250 companies across a range of organisational coaching initiatives to generate a meaningful ROI.



Notion Ltd.
12 Hamilton Terrace
Leamington Spa
CV32 4LY

T: 0845 456 8217

F: 0845 456 8218

E: info@notionltd.com

BusinessCoaching.co.uk