



Team Coaching - Are you getting it wrong?

As a founding member of the Association of Coaching, with a commercial career spanning three decades, and more than 20,000 hours of coaching experience under his belt, we reckon Martin (one of Notion's world class coaches) knows a thing or two about team coaching. In this exclusive interview, we ask Martin what he thinks everyone needs to know to get team coaching right.

Notion: What is team coaching?



Martin: Coaching 'one to one' is both a skill and an art; it takes many hours of training in the use of communication techniques and understanding important aspects of human behaviour and psychology. Coaching 'one to many' is even more of a skill and requires an artful approach that walks a fine line between coaching and other facilitative disciplines. It's confusing - even for coaches. Ask twenty coaches the difference between team and group coaching and you may well get twenty different answers. The confusion isn't helped by business professionals buying the service. Recently I received a phone call that went something like this:

 "Hi Martin, it's John here. You coached my colleague Sarah and she speaks very highly of you so, I was wondering if you did anything with teams and team building?"

"Good to speak with you John; do you mind me asking... what specifically are you wanting to achieve from a team event?"

"Well, I've got eight people in my team and we need to do something to improve performance."

The distinctions are fuzzy

Martin: After a ten minute chat with John it became apparent that he didn't need a team build or indeed team coaching, but what he wanted was some activity that involved all the eight team members. He needed something that brought them together; that had them focus on their own goals and share experiences; he wanted the same kind of benefits he'd seen his colleague Sarah experience through coaching. In my opinion, he wanted 'group coaching'. It's a distinction he wasn't aware of and he's by no means alone because it's a distinction about which most coaches are either unaware or unclear.

Notion: Is it group coaching or team coaching, and does it matter what it's called?

Martin: Coaching is still relatively new. It's not surprising then that some distinctions are as yet undefined - at least in terms that are generally accepted. The most obvious distinction and the one that causes the most confusion is that between team and group coaching. They are not the same thing. The terms are not interchangeable and the approach to coaching one or the other is not the same. So let's address that right now because without clarity we risk chaos.

I define team coaching as:

'The simultaneous facilitation of more than one person toward the achievement of a clearly specified and jointly held goal using coaching techniques'

As opposed to group coaching which is:

'The simultaneous facilitation of more than one person toward the achievement of each person's goals using coaching techniques'

Notion: Is the team coaching process the same as one-to-one coaching?

Martin: All effective coaching should be based in effective sequential questioning. Regardless of coaching one-to-one or one-to-many the coach must engage with the agenda of the coachee, have the coachee define at least an outcome goal and a session goal, have them establish the current circumstances and possible barriers to success, have them determine choices of approaches or actions and finally make it easy for the coachee to identify and commit to actions that take them closer to their goal. When coaching one-to-one that happens as a matter of course; but when faced with one-to-many it's not quite so straightforward.

"Just because they're called a team does not mean they are one."

Notion: What constitutes a team?

Martin: Typically management teams aren't really teams at all. They may share an overall goal but each will be judged on their own performance. The most successful of all team coaches was the late John Wooden. He was successful not because he had his team celebrate their successes and share in their failures as a unit, but because he did precisely the opposite. He successfully coached more successive championship wins and an unbeaten run of eighty-eight games on the bounce that has yet to be equalled; and he achieved it because he recognised that a successful team is made up of high performing individuals. Of course, they have to play with and for each other, but success is far more than that. Success comes from each person having specific 'game by game' goals. Success comes from improved individual performance.

Notion: Why doesn't team coaching always get results?

Martin: When it comes to coaching a team, all too often it's assumed that focusing a bunch of people who happen to work together on the challenge of becoming collectively more productive will achieve amazing results. It is assumed that somehow they will break free of their ego and become absorbed into a high performing collective - just by experiencing some team building activity in the presence of a coach. My experience suggests this is unlikely. At best they may uncover and agree on issues that may improve performance. At worst it's just a 'different' day out of the office. It usually depends on how effective the follow-up is afterwards as to how many of the commitments made on the day turn into real actions that make a difference.

Notion: What is the best way to coach a team?

Martin: Team Coaching works when everyone shares an easily definable short term goal: If the team event is ring-fenced by a specific project then the overall focus of each individual is predicated by the event: "We are meeting to thrash out project X". The overall goal is predicated by the project: "The project launches

on Jan 1st and we need to be ready". The session goal can then easily be established with the team: "We agree that by the end of this session we each have a plan of action that puts us on track for the Jan 1st launch". The coach may then ask questions of the group that establishes the reality of their situation and circumstance; barriers are identified and team members support each other through participation. Inevitably they will help each other identify opportunities and conclude a successful event with a commitment from each to take appropriate actions. Collectively the team improves performance by recognising and overcoming their shared barriers to success.

Notion: How does Group Coaching differ?

Martin: Group Coaching requires the coach to blend some facilitation skills with sequential coaching: The team members share an overall objective but each has a different challenge and hence will have something different on their mind: "We know we have to improve divisional performance but it's a challenge to see just how." The overall goal is overshadowed by the goal of each individual: "What's important to me is that I achieve x by z". Each person must, therefore, be allowed to establish their own session goal as part of the event. This requires some creativity from the coach to have team members working in smaller groups or pairs; sharing resources, information, needs and desires; then perhaps reporting back on behalf of each other: "This will have been successful for my colleague when she has a plan to address issues A and B." Typically a coach will then pull together themes and subject headings from what's been said to stimulate possible actions for evaluation. Inevitably individuals commit to actions relevant to their own situation and the achievement of their own goal. Collectively the team improves performance by each member of the group performing better.

Notion: So, how do people ensure that they are getting Team Coaching right?

Martin: It's important to recognise that Team Coaching is different from Group Coaching. They are different and it does matter what they are called. Being effective at coaching one-to-many starts with recognising these distinctions and this is one of the challenges of being a great all-round coach.

Notion: Thank you so much, Martin, for shedding light on what might be getting in the way of organisations taking full advantage of team coaching for commercial success. For anyone who would like to find out more about Team Coaching, please join our upcoming free webinar called 'Coaching the Team'. [Click here](#) for more details.

Notion is a global expert in behaviour change and coaching. To register for our 'Coaching the Team' webinar please [click here](#) or to find out about how our expert coaches can help coach teams in your organisation [click here](#). Alternatively, for more information call us for an informal chat on [+44 \(0\)1926 889 885](tel:+441926889885).

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