

Coaching at Work

“pp18-19 Internal”

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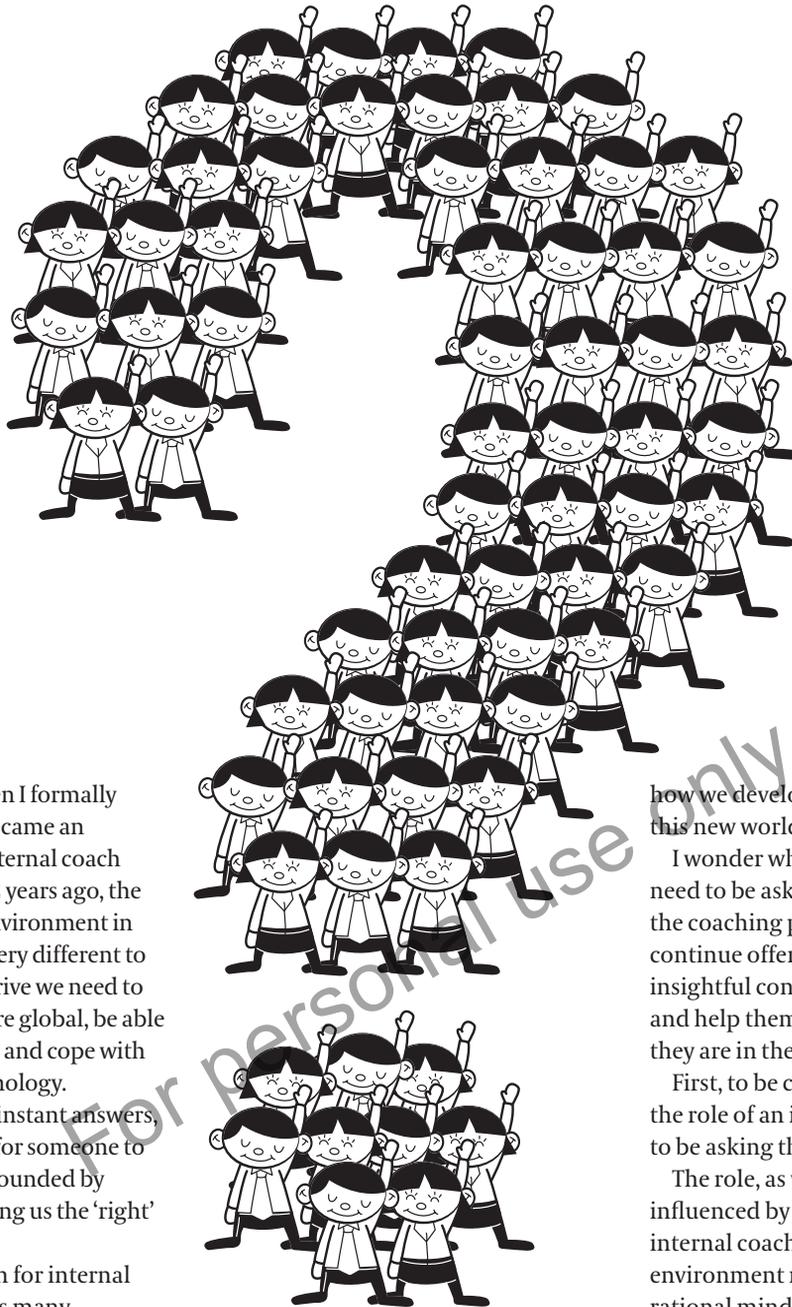
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ASK ME ANYTHING

What new questions do we ask our clients in a rapidly changing world, says Sara Hope, in the fourth in our series of columns on internal coaching/mentoring



When I formally became an internal coach 12 years ago, the environment in which I operated was very different to that of today. Yet, to thrive we need to adapt and become more global, be able to manage complexity, and cope with rapidly changing technology.

We have a desire for instant answers, we are always looking for someone to blame, and we are surrounded by prominent figures telling us the 'right' way of doing things.

What does this mean for internal coaching? I think it has many implications, first, in terms of how an internal coach supports clients to be at their best, and second, in relation to

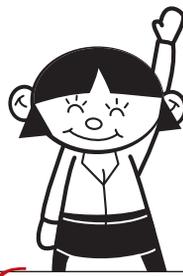
how we develop internal coaches in this new world.

I wonder what new questions we need to be asking ourselves if we, in the coaching profession, are to continue offering those deeply insightful conversations to our clients, and help them reconnect with who they are in the world today.

First, to be clear on the purpose of the role of an internal coach, we need to be asking the right questions.

The role, as we know, is strongly influenced by the context in which an internal coach operates. Often the environment may be driven by the rational mind, a desire to measure and analyse, and yet, what a client wants is that simple gift of being listened to.

They are hungry for the kind of



relationship that invites them to explore, to be challenged in a supportive way, and perhaps most importantly, to step out of the dizziness of the corporate world and to slow down and think.

This highlights perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing internal coaches in this new world. The day-to-day culture and environment in which an internal coach works is often the same as that of their clients. They are likely to be under the same pressure to measure, track and evaluate what they do. There could be competency frameworks in place and requirements to reach solutions.

Part of the role of an internal coach is to step out of this same world and create a space of quietness and reflection, as well as to challenge it. To be able to do this, in the moment, potentially in the same building, and in the same environment, requires personal courage, an ability to get centred and a willingness to speak what's often not been said before.

Necessary space

If coaches in organisations are to continue creating that necessary space for their clients, we need to be reflecting on the balance between our rational desire for structure and process, and not lose sight of the essence of the person.

Developing personal courage as an internal coach was not something I acquired on a training course alone; it took patience and more. It required the willingness to take risks and make mistakes. It required me to look inside myself. It required me to say hello to the 'unknown' and to let go of some of those deeply cherished beliefs I held.

We need to be brave and explore the deeper complexities surrounding what we are inviting an internal coach to do, and who we are asking them to be.

Where and with whom are our internal coaching and mentoring conversations going to make the most

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difference and have the most impact?

How can organisations get the greatest value from the skill of an internal coach or mentor in creating new connections, and helping clients seem themselves as part of a much wider system?

What can we do to enable internal coaches to have the capacity to step out of the dizziness and into the calmness of a thinking environment?

Feed the hunger

This leads me to the second question we need to be asking. What is the new face of learning for internal coaches?

The world of learning is moving at a rapid rate. Content is readily available. The question now is not, how can I publish material, but how can I socialise the material?

Learning content is evolving from a push to a pull model, where I, as a user, am used to having it available on demand, and easy to identify and access. With new channels such as social media and mobile, it is becoming important to consider how we enable the user to share material and rate it, rather than just tracking it.

It is important that we continue to develop an internal coaching profession that has the capacity to evolve with the changing environment of which it is a part, and to hold on to the courage to ask difficult questions.

While we need structures, processes, competencies and frameworks, we also need to touch the sparkle, and embrace what the new world of learning has to offer.

To what extent does the desire to have the badge with the tick on it drive the thinking around the solutions we

put in place? How much does our eagerness to deliver interventions get in the way of considered exploration of possibilities?

The opportunities to create new connections and explore new territories in internal coaching and mentoring are growing. Communities of practice among internal coaches and mentors in different organisational sectors, and across different geographical boundaries, are becoming more common.

New questions

If we hold on to the premise that one of our core goals as an internal coach is to enable our clients to learn, what are the new questions we need to be asking about learning?

When I engage with sponsors, and internal coaches themselves, areas critical to success, include: asking questions to help them think through how they want their clients to experience internal coaching, the purpose, how it's going to support performance and how they are going to socialise learning.

Rather than changing the way we develop people to have internal coaching and mentoring conversations, we need to keep adapting our approach.

We need to get comfortable with the unknown and continue to reflect on our questions. ■

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