

 PRACTISING WELL

Coaching: a new approach to address wellbeing and performance

BY **SHA PERERA**

THE 2018 WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT Survey carried out on the legal profession showed that there's never been a more opportune time to focus on lawyers' welfare and that real change to improve wellbeing in the workplace must come.

This makes helping lawyers at all levels to manage stress, and raise motivation and job satisfaction so much more important.

Changing the workplace culture goes a long way to achieve those goals. What is required from our leaders today is very different from the traditional form of leadership and requires a new approach to organisational development and employee wellbeing.

One such approach that is gaining more traction is the process of coaching.

A personal development partnership

In essence, coaching is a form of personal development. It's a partnership between the coach and client that assists to bridge the gap between where the client is now and where they would like to be, far more effectively than if they worked alone.

It's a creative, thought-provoking, learning conversation that helps to maximise personal and professional potential. My clients appreciate the space to think and reflect on their situation and the opportunity to speak openly with someone from outside of the organisation.

Whether it's for current and emerging leaders, new employees, support staff or those transitioning into retirement, the coaching approach is used across the board to improve professional skills, team engagement and employee wellbeing.

In my work with local legal firms I have identified common issues that lead to overall dissatisfaction at work. These include the overwhelm created by keeping up with legislative changes, increasing demands from clients, workload issues, constant interruptions, deadlines and balancing the time available with priorities and quality of work.

Managing work/life balance is also a huge concern and it can be easy for work to take over, with employees losing sight of what is important to them. Coaching helps to find practical ways to maintain a professional standard while getting back some balance in life. Solutions are proactive, positive and future focused.

I work with forward-thinking organisations with leaders who demonstrate a willingness to invest in the health and wellbeing of their workers to see them thrive in a high-pressure environment. These firms recognise the need for additional expertise to support and grow their teams and they want something that has the potential to create some lasting results. It's about retaining talent and increasing the wellbeing and capability of their people.

Law firms using coaching

One firm using coaching for their team is Takapuna-based Armstrong Murray. We started working together in March of this year, with all members of staff having some coaching sessions over a four-month period.

"It goes without saying that your staff are your most important asset," says John Armstrong, one of the partners. "We've worked hard on having a positive, productive and enjoyable working environment, so are always looking for ways to build on this. We heard about coaching; how it can help people to get the best out of themselves, by helping them to deal with challenges that may have been holding them back, to recognise their strengths and weaknesses so that they can find a better focus. We want our staff to be able to wring the maximum satisfaction out of being here and doing what they do. Coaching has certainly assisted that."

Morton Tee is another Auckland legal firm that is using coaching to support their team.

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“Our firm was entering a stage of transition and partner succession and we felt it important that our new team members have the opportunity to assess their personal and professional life-work balance,” says partner Stephen Tee.

“Coaching helped us to identify areas that created stress and address issues within our firms’ procedures. It also enabled the team to examine and communicate openly with each other and make change a positive learning process.”

Coaching helps to raise self-awareness, consider different perspectives and gain clarity about a situation, so the necessary action steps can be taken to achieve the desired outcome.

Individual focus

The impact of coaching is heightened because it is tailored to the needs of each individual. This personalised approach to managing stress and improving capability is far more effective than a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

While putting in place effective health and wellbeing practices is of utmost importance, coaching also supports individuals to raise their levels of emotional intelligence,

improve professional aspects of their work and implement strategies to achieve their goals. Clients are able to develop practical skills in communication, time management and improving work habits.

And these are just some of the benefits of a coaching conversation which is very different from consulting and giving ‘expert’ advice.

In coaching, the client is seen as the expert in their life/situation. Through the conversation, the client discovers what *they* need to do to move things forward, which may include the courage to seek the advice of other professionals or identification of gaps for further professional development.

Coaching is also very different from counselling or therapy. There is no need to delve into the past. Instead, the aim is to establish current and future desired state. The focus is on the strengths of the individual and moving forward in a positive and proactive way, rather than focusing on the negatives.

While the profession of coaching is still fairly new, the process of coaching is firmly grounded in neuroscience, positive psychology and adult learning theories.

Choosing a coach

So, how does an organisation choose a coach?

As coaching is still an unregulated profession most organisations look to hire a coach with professional credentials. An International Coach Federation (ICF) credential indicates compliance against rigorous education and practice requirements, supported by the set of core competencies and a code of ethics designed to protect and serve buyers of coaching.

Coaching is on the rise in New Zealand and while some traditional wellness programmes struggle to create sustainable change and a return on investment, coaching has the potential to make a difference to both employee wellbeing and performance and create the behavioural transformation required for long-term benefit to the individual and the organisation. ■

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