

COACHING AND MENTORING IN THE SERVICE OF CHANGE

Diane Newell and Alison Williamson

Coaching and mentoring is always in the service of change; change in individuals, in teams and in organisations. Whether in service of major transformational change or healthy adaptation, coaching and mentoring catalyses new ways of thinking, new confidence and new ideas.

In the two short examples below, my colleague Alison Williamson and I wanted to show how powerful coaching and mentoring conversations can be when integrated into 'the way we work'. In the first example we are sharing an experience of integrating coaching conversations into an organisational change programme. In the second we are sharing our experience of developing a new approach to training called 'ELECTRIC' coaching that focuses on enabling individuals to use coaching and mentoring conversations skillfully in a range of settings: peer to peer, an account manager with a client, an HR professional with a Director, a team member with a new graduate recruit or a line manager with their direct report and vice versa.

In both examples our experience has highlighted to us the particular power of coaching and mentoring conversations not only in catalysing change but also in making our working relationships productive and effective. In the organisational change example 'Changing the Customer Experience', teams recognised the impact that making time for purposeful, skillful and authentic conversations was having on 'revitalising' their relationships in a busy, target-focused environment. And feedback from our ELECTRIC Coaching® qualification, confirmed that even people who thought they were already having quality conversations at work, have taken value from the skills development and very quickly made some changes back at work that had surprising and very positive impacts.

EXAMPLE 1: CHANGING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Diane Newell



An FMCG (Fast-moving Consumer Goods) organisation was working with its major accounts sales teams to make a shift in how they impact and are perceived by their client partners.

Like many FMCG organisations, our client needed to respond to rapid shifts in their customers, who are the major grocery retailers in the UK. Led by a Change Project Leader, the senior sales team had created and defined a clear description of the behaviours and mind sets that would be required. The Change Project Leader, who had a background in talent development before joining the Sales function, was convinced that team leaders needed to offer effective coaching support to their teams to enable and embed these behaviours and so allow the investments being made in describing, defining and training to deliver the customer impact intended. Our first conversations were focused on how to develop those coaching skills in leaders in a way which was relevant to their agenda; and to give them the support and confidence they needed to use those skills to give clear feedback to their teams against the new behaviour model and to engage in effective 1-to-1 coaching with them.

The conversation progressed into thinking about how the teams themselves could support this change – moving away from the idea that coaching was ‘only’ from the manager to their direct reports. We joined with The Change Project Leader and senior sales leaders in designing and developing a series of team meetings for the first wave of teams participating. In those meetings we explored:

- What is the change we need to make?
- What is a coaching conversation – and how does it support that change?
- What skills and behaviours make coaching conversations impactful?
- How can we use those – with a series of exercises and opportunities to work with each other – to practise and share learning?

Reflecting on how our joint understanding developed and progressed it has struck me how quickly everyone involved recognised the value of coaching conversations in all of their interactions with each other, and how valuable they found the opportunities some structured team meetings gave them to ‘practice’ having those conversations with each other. The questions and challenges from the teams were not about ‘what is this coaching thing for?’ and there was little debate about when it might be valuable. This is because it was embedded into a need to support each other in making a jointly desired shift in behaviour and impact.

Giving the team an opportunity to explore how they had conversations in service of that shared goal created insight, in particular into:

- the power of reflection – especially shared reflection time
- the importance of balancing support and challenge – in particular the power of conversations around how someone could use a skill or strength more widely as well as addressing ‘gaps’.

It also allowed teams to recognise the impact that making time for conversations was having on ‘revitalising’ their relationships. In a busy, target-focused environment with demanding customers, it’s easy to forget to make time to talk to each other! And the teams were able to think together about their interactions with others, how they might use the skills and insights they had gained as they worked with other teams and functions in service of creating a more effective customer impact.



The teams in the first wave challenged us around the labels we were giving these conversations and skills – The Change Project Leader and The OCM’s Consultant Coach together reflected on a sense that us calling these ‘Coaching Conversations’ was in some way separating them from the purpose to which the conversations were being put. As a result, on later team days, which we delivered in partnership with The Change Project Leader, we talked instead about conversations ‘in service of change’.

As well as describing these conversations as skillful and effective we also looked at the need for them to be Purposeful and Authentic – with clear signaling about desired outcomes and stances. In particular we described two kinds of purpose of conversations:

- where you are seeking or offering advice and feedback to another
- where you are seeking or offering support to another in exploring the changes they need and want to make.

This gave us an opening to discuss the responsibilities of each partner in those conversations as well as the skills and frameworks that might support them and make them effective.

This intervention was sufficiently successful to get the attention of other parts of the business as a way of embedding coaching as a catalyst for change in their groups.

As we considered our learning from this, I have come away with four key lessons about how this allowed coaching to get ‘out of the box and in to the business’:

1. The importance of our relationship with the Change Project Leader, and her relationship with senior functional leaders. Because of that we were always part of their change project – not something separate, labelled ‘coaching’.
2. The importance of working to ‘beta test’ what we offered with the business leaders who own the change we are in service of – it was a real and positive creative partnership in which we had to be willing to let go of some ways of thinking as well as willing to challenge the clients’ assumptions at times.
3. Rooting coaching (and mentoring) in ‘conversations’ – something that we all have abilities in (especially sales people), so that this becomes an extension of existing capabilities, used in particular ways rather than as a new and ‘different’ skill.
4. The value of providing ongoing coach- mentoring support for team leaders as they adopt and role model giving feedback and coaching around the behavioural shifts needed – as well as offering support in making those shifts themselves.

EXAMPLE 2: FROM SPARK TO FINISH: ELECTRIC COACHING® – A NEW WAY OF EMBEDDING A COACHING APPROACH

Alison Williamson



Given the increasing importance of productive relationships in today’s complex organisations and ambiguous and uncertain environments, the opportunity for training in simple and practical coaching skills and approaches to enhance conversations in the workplace is truly enormous. After supporting several thousand candidates through our qualifications in the last 18 years, we’ve got to know a lot about the whole journey from our candidates’ perspectives.

Taking a look at our accredited Foundation Level Certificate in Coaching and Mentoring, we realised that whilst it’s ideal for creating effective internal coaches, we may be offering more than is actually needed for some people. Many Foundation candidates have told us they needed to use a coaching style, rather than having formal coaching sessions, which ultimately made us question whether we could offer a new qualification with a very different approach. On reflection we felt we should and could.

Our starting point was, as you would expect in a coaching context, the end:

- What do people actually need from an introductory level coaching qualification?
- Who are they and in what jobs/roles would they use the skills development?
- What coaching skills do they need and in what context would they use them?
- What’s essential to include and what’s not?

Instinctively we knew this programme should be for:

- Anyone who has the opportunity to have coaching style conversations to develop others at work, whether they have line management responsibility or not.
- Anyone who wants to develop a coaching approach in their workplace conversations with individuals and groups/ teams.
- Anyone who’s looking for a way of helping others to take responsibility for their jobs, rather than waiting for direction or approval.
- Anyone who can think of good things they’d like to do with their time if they could just find a way to spend less time telling and fixing stuff for others.



With a blank sheet of paper and one eye on the EMCC Foundation competencies, we knew that tweaking any of our existing products was not an option; we really did need to start this design from scratch and question everything. The aim was to design a brand-new programme, which did all it needed to, quickly and efficiently, without cutting corners. Time is precious – our candidates have told us that so many times. With this in mind, every element and every minute of learning had to count; if something didn't absolutely meet the overall outcomes it couldn't be included. Naturally, everything that we regarded as essential for having great coaching conversations had to be present.

The focus was to take a candidate from their initial programme 'welcome' to being able to embed a coaching approach at work and see real results in just 6-8 weeks. We also felt it was possible to use some new and different approaches, for example, in the way we assess candidates.

A 25-hour programme began to evolve, that could be achieved quickly whilst being packed with learning, as well as being both practical and straightforward to complete.

We wanted to create a framework that would encourage everyday conversations to become more effective – that would improve engagement and motivation. We felt that existing models were often too prescriptive and we wanted to equip candidates with an easy and memorable reference point, rather than a script to follow. So, we developed a brand-new coaching model called "ELECTRIC" and this has formed a key part of our predictably named ELECTRIC Coaching® qualification.

In a coaching conversation, the intention is always to assist the other person to move forward in some way, in their thinking and feel challenging to receive. Nevertheless, the test as to whether or not to give the feedback has to be about whether it will in some way, help the other person to receive it. In ELECTRIC Coaching® we help people to give honest, useful feedback without judgement and with no agenda other than to help someone move forward.

Conversations between people at work often adopt a familiar pattern; one that can settle into a complacent rhythm with both people contributing, but with ill thought through questions that generate poor answers or even restrict thinking altogether. Coaching works on the premise that the other person has the ideas, the solutions, and the answers even if they don't know it. Insightful questions, asked by the coach, become the mechanism to create a space for thinking and free up all that potential. It tends to follow that the better the question, the better the quality of the thinking, so in ELECTRIC Coaching® we help people to ask great questions in their conversations.

Listening has become an essential skill in the workplace, so much so that you'll find it in any leadership or coaching book. In ELECTRIC Coaching®, our focus is on helping delegates become skilled in active listening. We believe that active listening is not a passive activity or a sustained pause; it takes skill, concentration and effort. It involves staying present with someone for the whole duration of the conversation and keeping mind and body focused on them. Coaching is not about telling people what to do; it's through actively listening and asking insightful questions that the coach in the conversation helps the other person to think and develop their own ideas and plans.

THE PILOT

ELECTRIC Coaching® was piloted in November 2015 and from the pre-work starting with an online module a couple of weeks before the workshop, to the postworkshop assessment, the whole process took 8 weeks. That's it: fast, effective and pain-free, but still robust. The pilot programme showed us it worked really well.

Impact and Outcomes

Delegates from our ELECTRIC Coaching® pilot have described the value they've discovered, not just for others but also for themselves. In making time to think, using our ELECTRIC framework for reflection and self-development, they have reported some rapid and immediate improvements to their own contexts.

Ultimately, we are confident that ELECTRIC Coaching® will continue to enable people to improve the quality of their conversations at work, enable others to find and keep responsibility and grow. Plus, we've uncovered the very welcome truth that it really does create time and space for those things that we hadn't yet found time to work on.

Our pilot programme delegates have been very generous with their feedback. We've been truly delighted with the overwhelmingly positive response to ELECTRIC Coaching® and the impact it's had already.

We asked delegates: "What would you say to others about ELECTRIC Coaching® – Everyday Coaching Skills?" and here's a selection of feedback:

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“It's a fantastic course with great content and some real skills that can be taken away and applied immediately in your day-to-day conversations. The course itself has a great balance of presentation, discussion and practical application. Be prepared to commit a few hours to your pre-work in order to get the most out of it, failure to do so would make the experience poorer.”

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“Amazing! What a clever use of simple tools. Great to really see and experience how the ELECTRIC Coaching™ technique can transform ideas, thinking, management support and really support others in feeling motivated and taking ownership of their dilemmas.”

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“The two-day course felt really comfortable, allowing the group to get to know each other and providing plenty of time for discussion. The content was well balanced. The post-workshop elements of the course ensured learnings were put into practice and the final assessment was a great opportunity to reflect.”

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“I would say to others that the ELECTRIC Coaching™ framework provides a structure within which conversations can happen where the person being coached is the centre of attention; where they are encouraged to explore their ideas/thinking/ challenges in a non-judgemental, open and supportive way; and where they, as the person being coached, have the time to think through and articulate what they might do differently in the future to deal with the matter at hand. The framework then encourages commitment to review specific actions over time to ensure the discussion leaves a pragmatic and lasting legacy – hopefully delivering a sought-after change for the better. I would also say that the framework is useful, not just in a work scenario, but may be used to structure helpful conversations with one's friends and family. It also helps the coach to listen and be patient, allowing the thoughts of the person being coached to take centre stage rather than them being given a solution or being 'told' what to do.”

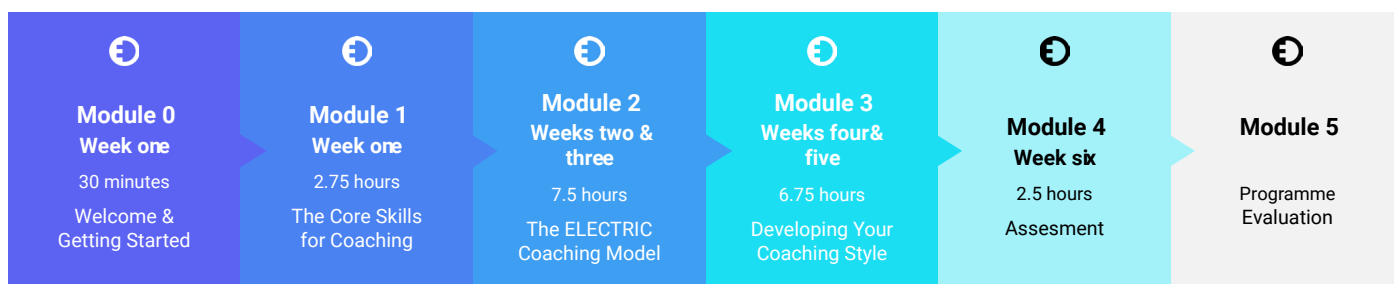
WHAT NEXT?

We are delighted to say that every one of the nine people who took part in our pilot have successfully completed the programme. We have just heard that our application for EMCC accreditation at Foundation Level for ELECTRIC Coaching™ has been approved by the EMCC International Panel, which is terrific news. We already have three further in-company ELECTRIC Coaching™ Programmes running in the next few weeks. We are also offering open programmes in London, Oxford and Birmingham from April onwards.

Even at this early stage, ELECTRIC Coaching® has proved our hunch to be true: that by offering just what people need and dispensing with the non-essentials, we can offer something that really helps delegates to embed a coaching style in their everyday conversations.

We're proud to have created our very own coaching model (featured on Day One of the workshop) that actually works so effectively! We hope ELECTRIC Coaching™ will continue to inspire people to use coaching approaches and have coaching conversations to add value and new thinking to the coaching world.

Diane Newell, Managing Director Coaching Services, The OCM Contact: diane.newell@theocm.co.uk Alison Williamson, Head of Quality and Design, The OCM, written in 2016.



2022 UPDATE

Since this initial pilot our ELECTRIC programme has gone from strength to strength. Over 1000 candidates and 100 organisations have used ELECTRIC to develop a coaching style that improves individual and team performance. We've also developed ELECTRIC Online® – allowing global access to a wholly digital, engaging, high impact and supportive 20-hour programme (spread over six weeks).

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We're proud to have created our very own coaching model that works so effectively! We are confident that ELECTRIC Coaching® and ELECTRIC Online® will continue to inspire people to use coaching approaches and have coaching conversations that add value and new thinking in any workplace.