

TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP THROUGH COACHING

cardfactory

OVERVIEW

In today's complex and fast-paced retail environment, Card Factory, a leading UK retailer of cards, gifts, and celebration essentials, recognised the need for a new kind of leadership, and a renewed focus on becoming omnichannel.

With over 1,000 stores and nearly 10,000 employees, Card Factory faced the challenge of uniting a diverse, multi-generational workforce.

Despite the decline of card sales, the celebration industry continues to create opportunities. Jo Wainwright, Head of People Development and Sustainability, identified quickly upon joining the organisation in early 2021 that Card Factory needed something completely different.

"I started by asking, what does good leadership look like? Then, I explored what leadership behaviours we already had at Card Factory - how leaders saw themselves and what they valued in others. From there, I identified the gaps between our current leadership and the ideal. As I analysed these themes, one solution stood out clearly: coaching. It became obvious that coaching was the key to addressing those gaps and strengthening leadership across the business."

Jo pitched her vision by framing coaching as a tool to help managers and leaders enhance their ability to lead effectively, engage in more effective conversations, and boost team performance.

To meet these leadership challenges, Card Factory partnered with The OCM to embed a coaching culture across the organisation. This initiative aimed to empower leaders, improve communication, and drive sustainable performance by developing strong coaching skills, such as listening, questioning, and giving feedback.

Card Factory had clear organisational strategic goals and The OCM took time to understand these together, identifying where the power of coaching and mentoring could support their aims and achieve the biggest impact. This included a series of interventions throughout the organisation, as well as the transformation of its behavioural framework by embedding a coaching approach.

“ Once someone experiences coaching, they gain a deeper self-awareness and begin to see how transformational it can be for the organisation. — Jo Wainwright, Head of People Development & Sustainability ”



EMBEDDING A COACHING CULTURE

Throughout the partnership, The OCM has delivered coaching and mentoring through:

- Two Apprenticeship programmes
- ELECTRIC® Online
- Team Coaching to Card Factory Executives
- Diploma in Professional Coach-Mentoring
- Certificate in Coach-Mentoring
- Coaching Fundamentals

Ed Parsloe, Chief Executive of The OCM says, “it might well be that using the apprenticeship to develop skills is the right thing, but actually without stopping and taking a moment to think through what impacts a prospective client is trying to create through coaching and mentoring, often there might be better or different ways of enabling that organisation to harness that transformative power of what coaching and mentoring can do in service of those strategic objectives.”

“It’s about helping people feel empowered to find the answers themselves. When you coach them to question challenges from a different perspective, they need you less and become more self-sufficient.” — **Trish Burnett, Senior People Development Practitioner**

This approach helped shift the culture from directive leadership to one of non judgemental inquiry, reflection, and empowerment. Coaching was not just a skill; it became a mindset.

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When coaching takes root, leaders shift from directing to unlocking potential and from managing people to inspiring growth.

— **Louise Harker, Senior People Development Practitioner**

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Even though the solutions have seemed obvious, delivering them has had to fit into a challenging, fast-paced environment that is notoriously time poor traditional tell environment. Much of the workforce operates on differing shift schedules, limiting their availability, and needing to factor in seasonal impacts.

“Partnering with Card Factory on their culture shift was a great experience for us. This kind of collaboration, where we engage across the leadership teams to embed a coaching mindset throughout the organisation, is exactly what energises us. Seeing tangible impact at every level is what makes these partnerships so rewarding.” — **Ed Parsloe, Chief Executive of The OCM**

EXECUTIVE ENGAGEMENT: LEADING BY EXAMPLE

A significant milestone came when The OCM engaged with Card Factory's Executive Team which became key to embedding the behaviour change. The Executive Team participated in a dedicated team coaching session, which was designed to:

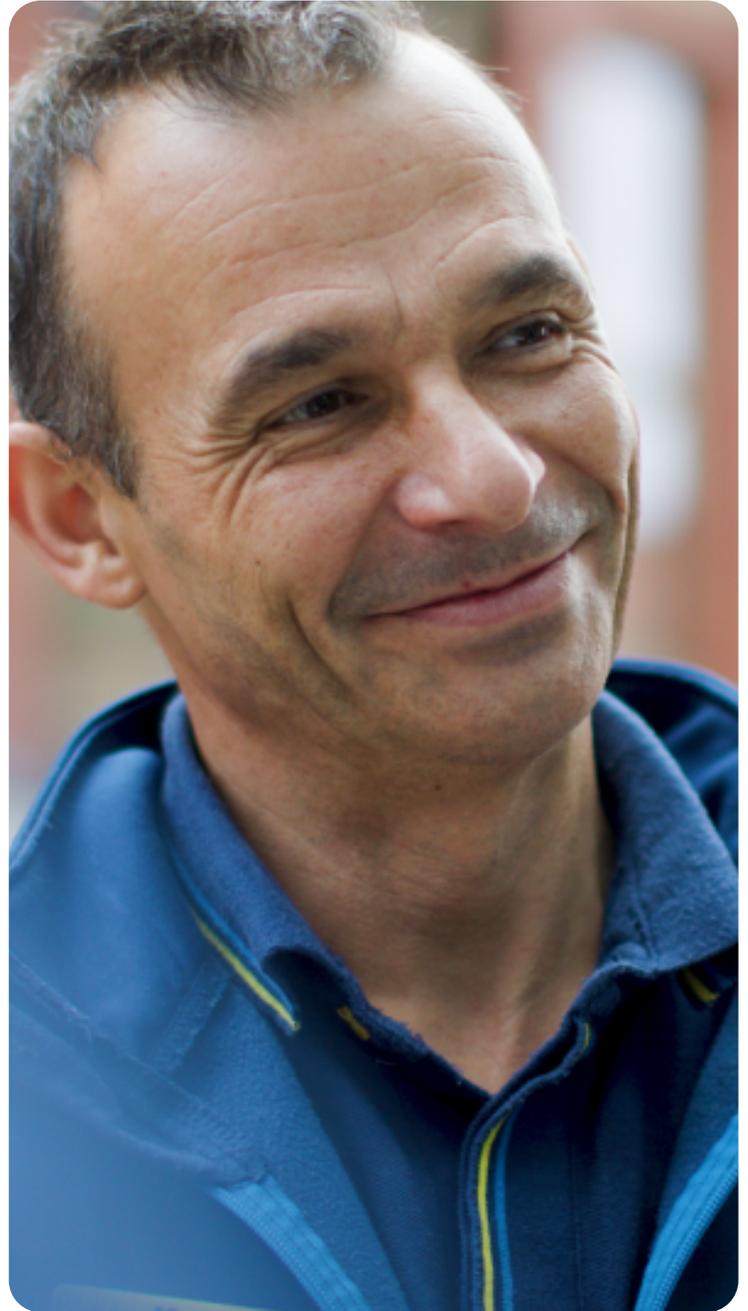
- Share the coaching skills and framework that Card Factory leaders had been learning and applying
- To support the Executive Leadership Team in developing their own coaching skills
- To explore with the Executive Leadership Team their role in creating a coaching culture at Card Factory.

The session helped the Executive Team understand their role in shaping culture and inspired personal commitments to embed coaching across the business.

MEASURABLE IMPACT

The coaching initiative has delivered tangible results:

- Apprenticeships: Multiple cohorts enrolled in Level 5 Coaching and Level 4 Mentoring programmes to develop a deep understanding of coaching and mentoring throughout the organisation.
- Transforming leaders to move to an 'ask' not 'tell' approach, helping them to develop greater initiative, problem solving and empowerment in their teams, which in turn unlocked performance and internal progression opportunities.
- Leadership Development: A new leadership framework centred on self-leadership and behavioural change
- Team Coaching: Senior leaders experienced coaching first-hand, reinforcing its value
- Cultural Shift: Coaching embedded into everyday conversations, performance reviews, and development plans.



WHY THE OCM?

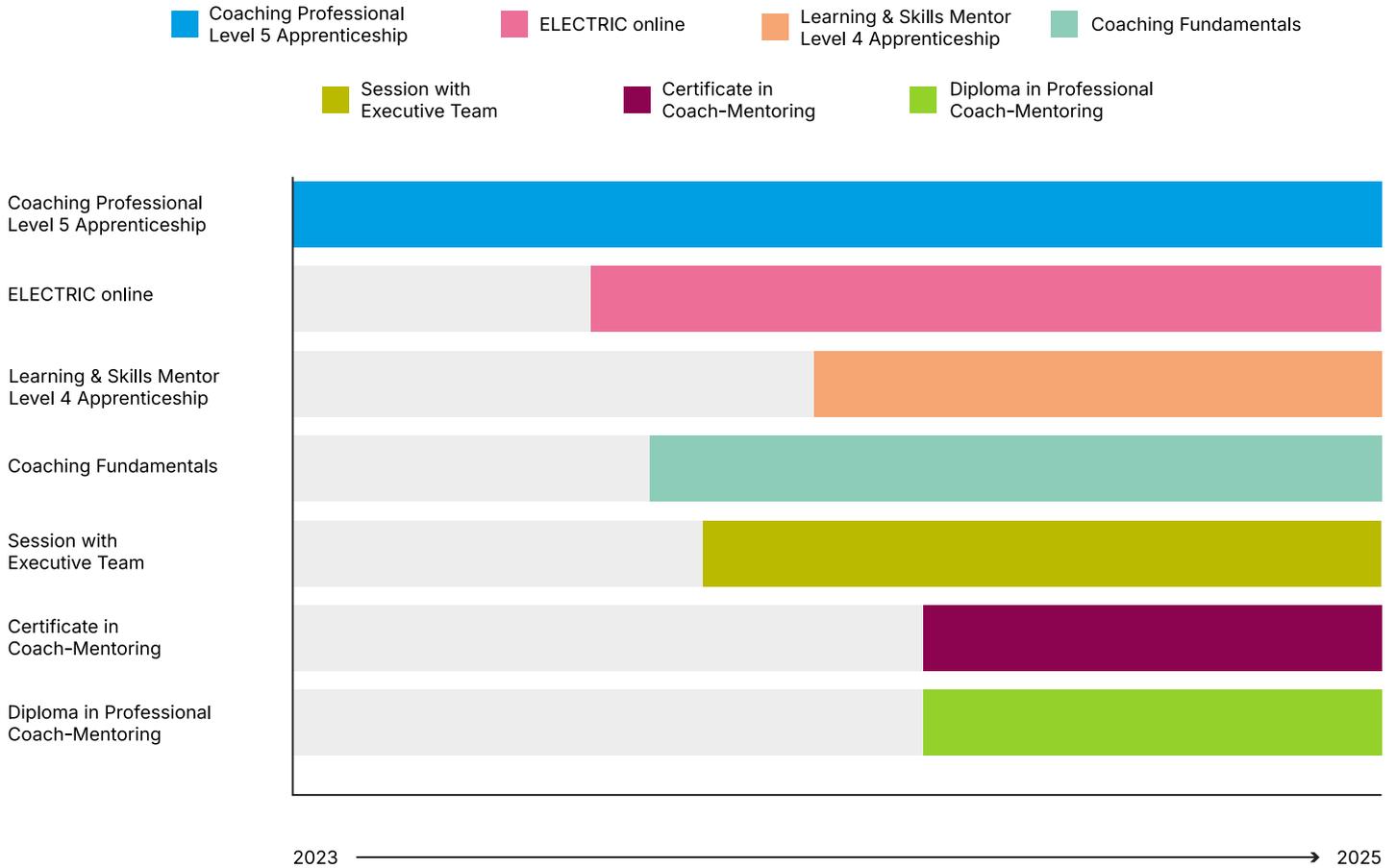
Card Factory chose The OCM for their deep expertise in coaching and mentoring, not just as a training provider, but as a strategic partner.

"The OCM have years of experience and unique credible foundation; you're a specialist in coaching and mentoring that's what we needed and wanted" — **Jo Wainwright, Head of People Development & Sustainability**

"Seeing tangible impact at every level is what makes these partnerships so rewarding." — **Ed Parsloe, Chief Executive, The OCM**

“ At the senior leadership level in Card Factory, there is a strong emphasis on developing coaching skills. It helps leaders better understand their own behaviours and bring out the best in others. ”

DELIVERING COACHING AND MENTORING: A TIMELINE



A LASTING LEGACY

This cultural transformation was driven by Jo Wainwright’s vision and the commitment of Card Factory’s leadership. Coaching is now a strategic enabler, supporting leadership, performance, and talent development.

As a result of introducing coaching conversations, the Executives, the Senior Leadership Team, and other regional and retail managers at Card Factory have learnt how to step back, challenge their teams, coach them through problems, and delegate in a way that empowers people to find their own solutions. It has been a big change, but one that’s continuously making a real impact across the whole organisation.

In addition to coaching, through the Learning & Skills Mentor Apprenticeship, Card Factory have also seen a large number of individuals across retail being mentored to build a talent pipeline of future leaders and bridge that gap between store managers and regional manager roles, and regional manager and head of roles, which has always been a big gap to fill within the organisation.

“This apprenticeship has been life changing... What took me by surprise was the focus on us as individuals and how our analysis of self would play such a key role in developing us into solid mentors for others. Completing the course, having supervision, gaining support from my peer group on the cohort has helped me to break down the barriers and finally move past my fears. I have gained self-confidence, and this has helped to remove the blinkers around feedback.”

— James Flower, Retail Change Manager