

COACHING FOR CHANGE by Diana Danziger

Most organisations are adept at identifying people who are both able and motivated to lead change within the organisation. Whether it's seen as an integral part of the person's role or whether they are dubbed "agent of change", there are some people in all organisations who are seen as those who can and will make change happen. In other situations, there are those who are tasked with leading change because of changing circumstances in the organisation. Many organisations recognise that these people – however able they may be – can benefit from some external support from a coach.

Coaching change leaders is, in my experience, a very stretching and reward exercise in support and challenge. For one thing, as a coach you have to have a solid understanding of the organisation's (or division's, or business unit's) strategy and the antecedents and reasons for change. While it might be helpful to ask those "stupid" questions like "And how do you see that action fitting with the overall strategy?" as a coach you also have to have some comprehension of those issues yourself in order to provide thought-provoking prompts and responses to your coachee.

You also have to have a pretty thorough understanding of your coachee's cognitive style and their own attitude to change in order to provide effective coaching. We all know that effective communication is critical to effective change and while most people will admit to there being room to improve their communication skills, they generally find it helpful to understand the different ways in which others may be processing their ideas and why it is that their message doesn't seem to be getting across clearly. There are a number of ways that coaches can use to get a "head start" in this – using psychometrics, following their coachees around in the course of their day-to-day activities and observing how they interact with others, or using role-plays to allow clients to try out alternative approaches to getting their messages across.

The third key area that is critical to coaching leaders of change is in helping them to understand their own reactions to change and the different ways that other people are likely to respond to change. This involves suspending judgement ("Why on earth should it matter where people's desks are located?") in favour of understanding that different people have different concerns and priorities when it comes to change. As a leader, during change as well as in other circumstances, responding to others on their terms can make all the difference between struggle and success.