

What is coaching?

In this short article Jim McGovern gives his views on the changing nature of coaching and its potential in helping the oil and gas industry.

Coaching has become a buzz word in the oil and gas industry. Managers keen to improve performance, are happy to part with significant sums of money without really knowing what they are buying. How can organisations wise up and improve their use of coaching?

Understanding what coaching is and is not, is a great place to start. Coaching has been described as '*unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance, helping them to learn rather than teaching them*'. At its heart it is about building the individual's self awareness, creating stronger personal responsibility and enhancing self belief.

So what's it good for? Well ten years ago there was little good quality research behind the claims made by coaches. Coaching seemed to have a positive impact but few research evidence was available to show how it worked or in what situations it could contribute to better outcomes. Now thanks to the work of leading coaches such as Dr Tony Grant from Australia and Dr Jonathan Passmore from the UK, we now have a better understanding of coaching's role to improve performance and safety (check out www.mondaypsychologists.co.uk for free articles on coaching research).

Dr Grant's work has focused on understanding the psychological dimensions which can be enhanced by coaching, such as resilience and self esteem. Dr Jonathan Passmore's work has been focused in the last couple of years on safety critical environments. Most recently Dr Passmore has been working with the UK police in helping them use coaching in teaching pursuit and security driving. Both areas of high risk due to the speeds involved.

So what is coaching? Coaching at its very essence centres on the coachee and not the coach. The coach is not an expert in the coachee's field, but is an expert in the coaching process. The coach's skills are paramount to the success of the coaching relationship and to the outcomes which are achieved. Highly trained and qualified coaches get better results than those with limited training.

So how can a manager verify the competence of a coach? Coaching is very popular across a variety of industries and has become a lucrative business in itself. Unfortunately this gives rise to unscrupulous companies that provide coaches who have limited training and no formal certification in coaching.

In making a decision about which coach to appoint the manager is best to check their coach, like their health and safety advisor has the right qualifications. A failure to do this puts at risk the success of the coaching, as well as placing at risk the work of the coachee. There are a number of different qualifications which are recognised internationally including university qualifications in coaching, the International Coaching Federation qualifications and the Institute for Leadership & Management coaching awards. The later is the most popular in the UK. ILM offers both level 5 (graduate level) and level 7 (post graduate level) training.

Lastly, managers should ask their potential coaches about their experience, about the coaching models they use and about the CPD (supervision) arrangements.

The Oil and Gas industry has been ahead in many areas of practice, in coaching the game has changed and the industry can now expect more from its coaches, if we are to get the best and safest outcomes on our projects.