

Replace the Goalposts

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SMEs often control the lives of their owners, rather than the other way round, but that's where a business coach can help. Michael Kamlish explains how to be one.

If you've spotted the term "business coach" appearing more and more often in the business press, you may be wondering just what it is that a business coach does. Coaching has been around for a long time in sport, of course, but it entered the corporate lexicon 12 years ago when Brad Sugars, an Australian accountant and entrepreneur, developed the concept and launched Action International, which is now one of the world's biggest business coaching organisations.

Just as sports coaches push athletes to achieve their optimum performance and motivate them whenever the going gets tough, business coaches can help company owners to overcome the problems they face in running their firms and encourage them to stay focused and realise their ambitions.

What can a business coach offer someone who has been in management for years? The answer can be found by returning to the sporting analogy: even the most talented sports stars use coaches, because they can recognise the full extent of an athlete's potential, tap into it and then use their expertise to guide the athlete to winning ways. In the same way, business coaches have the skills to help entrepreneurs - and their firms - perform to their potential.

In essence, most of the problems encountered by business owners relate to time, people and money. For example, many proprietors get so involved in the day-to-day work that they are unable to run the business and drive it forward at the same time. They also tend to delegate tasks rather than responsibility, so they always end up checking that their staff have done jobs properly (see panel, top of page 60). The main reason why most people decide to work with a business coach concerns money. They realise that they simply aren't earning enough to reward themselves for all the work they're doing. In effect, they want to achieve a better return on their investment and realise their personal financial ambitions.

Swede spot: coaches need to identify a business's potential and use their expertise to help entrepreneurs improve performance.

The business coaching industry has developed comprehensive systems and methods to help business owners manage and develop their firms. Action International, for example, has more than 400 different strategies, each of which focuses on specific areas such as business development, time management and team-building.

The actual coaching process typically involves weekly contact with clients to help them implement the strategies that have been agreed and to help identify any other areas that might require attention. It is this regular contact and commitment to help clients achieve their goals that differentiates coaching from consultancy.

Action International operates as a franchise business, so becoming an accredited coach entails purchasing a franchise. Included in the cost (49,000 plus VAT) is an intensive two-week residential training programme, which is followed by a three-month induction. In addition, coaches receive regular coaching and training themselves.

Apart from the high earning potential - many coaches earn between 150,000 and 200,000 a

year - what makes it particularly attractive to accountants who have worked in business is the satisfaction of channelling their skills and experience to help other business owners. What's more, with over four million small to medium-sized enterprises in the UK, the market for business coaching is both large and largely untapped.

Michael Kamlish is director of the Direct Communications Company. For further information on how to become a business coach, visit www.action-unitedkingdom.com.

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