

Our approach to Executive coaching

Increasingly, coaching is being viewed as one of the most practical and cost-effective ways to provide development opportunities, especially those who hold management and leadership roles. It is focused on the client's own experiences, their specific needs and provides a confidential environment to discuss what may sometimes be difficult issues for an individual leader to address alone.

Coaching in a work environment has many similarities to coaching in a sporting context. It is not a remedial activity for those who underperform, but rather a technique to help everyone to perform even better and become their best selves for more of the time. As in sport, the coach does not need to be an expert in the client's field of work, but they do need to be an expert in executive coaching and helping people to learn from their own experiences. We are confident that you will find this to be the case with Azure coaches, who are all passionate about coaching and genuinely interested in their clients. They are all highly skilled, qualified at a senior level, undertake regular CPD and Professional Supervision and are members of either the European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC) or the International Coach Federation (ICF).

The coach has a number of important roles during the coaching sessions. These include:

- Ensuring the coaching is based on realistic goals against which success can be measured.
- Helping the client to become resourceful so that they can think creatively to consider options they may not have previously considered.
- Providing an appropriate balance between challenge and support, giving honest feedback where it will help the client.
- Ensuring clients set themselves reasonable actions for change to which they are genuinely committed and prepared to be held accountable for.
- Building great rapport with the client and gaining feedback about their coaching style and how well the experience is working for the client.
- Keeping the coaching conversation on track to get the most from precious time available.

Coaching can help employees in all aspects of their performance. However, our work as leadership development professionals means that we are most often helping our clients to become more effective in their roles as Leaders and Managers.

The Azure guiding principles of coaching are:

1. To trust in the resourcefulness of your client
2. To be guided by the agenda of each client
3. The coach and client are equals
4. Coaching should facilitate action and personal change

We believe that coaching can only be successful when the coach and client are truly *'in rapport'* with one another and as such, our coaches will take time at the outset to develop a trusting relationship between the two parties.

At the initial meeting (usually known as contracting), ground rules for the coaching relationship will be discussed so that the coach and client have clarity about what they can expect from one another. In addition, the coach will find out more about the client's role, current circumstances and past history, as well as understanding what the client wants to achieve as a result of the coaching relationship.

Specifically, Azure executive coaches will always want to agree at the outset the goals by which the success of the coaching activity will be measured

In most circumstances, this part of the contracting will involve a 3 way sponsorship meeting with the coach, client and their Sponsor (usually their Line Manager if they have one.) The purpose is to discuss with all parties present, the rationale for the coaching activity and the ways in which its success will be assessed. It ensures that any constructive feedback which needs to be given to the client from the sponsor has been delivered clearly and that everyone is fully aware of the focus the coaching needs to have. It will also help the sponsor to understand how they can support the client during the time period that the coaching is taking place.

When a 360-degree feedback exercise has already been completed, this report or a personal development plan can also be a good starting place to discover suitable areas for focus within the coaching context. If this has not taken place, and is desirable, we can facilitate this activity for our clients.

Following the contracting sessions, the coach will provide further information outlining how to get the most from the coaching process and will send the client a draft of the agreed goals to review. The client then has the chance to amend the goals if necessary and to ensure the sponsor is also in agreement that they reflect the goals discussed. Clearly, over time, these may develop, and further goals may be added. From then on, a series of sub-goals will be agreed for each of the sessions during which the coach and client work together.

Coaching relationships work most effectively when the coaching sessions are planned over a period of time. In that way, clients have time to work through a number of issues, know exactly when the next meeting will be and have specific actions to work towards, agreed at the end of each meeting.

Coaching sessions usually take place every 4 – 6 weeks at times to suit both parties. At the very beginning when there is lots to address, when new to a role, or if major changes are taking place, the client may wish to meet more regularly.

Each of these sessions takes place either virtually or at the client's own place of work in a private room and normally lasts between 1.5 and 2 hours (virtual sessions tend to be at the shorter end of the scale.)

We usually suggest that 12 hours of coaching are agreed at the outset, as it is often difficult to see significant progress within a shorter timescale. For some, a longer period of coaching may need to be agreed depending on the development areas being undertaken.

If for any reason, a client finds themselves unable to make a meeting, we ask that they call our office or email us as soon as they become aware of this fact. If the cancellation is made within less than 10 working days of the coaching session, the full fee would normally still be charged.

When the client has made significant and sufficient progress towards the initial goals, the coaching relationship will normally come to a natural end point, although the client may choose to resume the relationship with a person they know and trust at a later date should a set of new challenges arise.

Within Azure, we seek to make clients independent through improved confidence, not dependent upon our coaches for the longer term. As such, if the coaching comes to a natural end point before our agreed number of sessions, we will be honest with the client and ensure no unnecessary time or costs are incurred.

The coaching sessions themselves have a broad agenda around:

- Goal setting and clarification
- Current position analysis
- Options for moving forward and discussion
- Agreement of the way forward

Further than this we do not prescribe, as we fundamentally believe coaching is about promoting discovery and the session should be tailored to meet the client's real needs facilitated by the coach but with the client being held accountable for agreed change.

Azure coaches have access to many tools, activities and resources that they will offer to the clients whenever they are likely to add value to the process.

Our relationship is primarily built between coach and client, with confidentiality respected.

As we often work with a range of coaching clients within the same organisation, we ensure we familiarise ourselves with the 'direction of travel' and corporate goals for the whole organisation. For example, clients often wish to change the culture, and it is important for our coaches to understand what that culture change needs to be in order to coach most effectively within this context.

We do not specialise in working with one particular industry, as we believe it can be of enormous benefit that our coaches have experience working with a diverse range a range of sectors. All our coaches have worked in senior positions within a variety of public and private sector organisations.

The effectiveness of all coaching assignments is measured against the initial coaching goals our clients set themselves, along with an evaluation of the coaching relationship.

Quality Assurance, Supervision and Development

All Azure coaches receive regular supervision to protect the wellbeing of the coach and client and ensure the coaching is of a sufficiently high standard. This takes place on an ad-hoc basis for each client, as well as a regular periodic review of each coach's client portfolio. If required, we have a full range of alternative professionals to whom we can refer/recommend to clients.

On a regular basis, all coaches also undertake continuous professional development (CPD). We then share our learning with one another on a regular basis and purposely choose to attend different events so that we can maximise our skills development.

Common issues brought to Executive Coaching

<p>Sally was new to her organisation and as a first time Chief Executive was keen to work out how to build a highly effective Senior Leadership Team, from what initially seemed like a really dysfunctional one.</p>	<p>Shaheed had been promoted to a director from within the business and was really excited about his new role. Whilst he had great relationships with his team, he needed to work out how change his relationship from colleague to leader and how to build more influence with senior colleagues across the whole organisation.</p>	<p>Karen was highly ambitious and motivated to make transformational change. However, she was struggling to engage others with the change and came to coaching as a result of some harsh feedback from her chairman.</p>
<p>Dan was worn down and felt as if he was at breaking point. He was working excessive hours which were affecting his relationships outside work. He was desperate to gain a new position but couldn't work out how to get himself in the right 'headspace to do so.'</p>	<p>Gina had been successful in gaining a new role but constantly felt like she was suffering from 'imposter syndrome.' She wanted to work out how to make the most of her opportunity without her colleagues being aware that she was struggling at times.</p>	<p>Jay was doing really well in her role and had been identified as a 'high potential' within her company. Her manager wanted her to have some coaching to help her recognise her strengths</p>