

WINNING TEAM

Coaching can help treasury leaders and their reports to reach peak performance. Stuart Pickles suggests a strategy for success

How many of us in finance and treasury do not face big challenges at work at the moment? And how many of us are on top of our game and have all the answers?

When anyone faces a new challenge (whether it's the CFO or the accounts clerk), it's very unlikely that they will have all the answers to the questions facing them. This applies equally whether they're working on a major acquisition, an organisational change programme or a complex refinancing project, or whether they're just taking on new and unfamiliar job responsibilities or preparing for promotion.

Leading the finance and/or treasury function is among the toughest managerial roles that exist because it requires outstanding technical ability and strong emotional intelligence. But without clear answers to the challenges that face us, we can lack resourcefulness and veer towards negative thinking, which can easily impact outward behaviour and effectiveness. When this happens to leaders, people notice very quickly and the negativity can spread rapidly, affecting performance and results.

Does any of this sound familiar? Do you know people who might be going through this? Does it ever happen to you? If so, it might be time to think about coaching.

The basics of coaching

Stripped down to its basics, coaching is a conversation that deals with challenges by eliciting crystal-clear answers to the following questions:

- ◆ How would you define your goals?
- ◆ What options do you have to achieve your goals?
- ◆ What are the concrete, actionable plans that you can follow to achieve them?
- ◆ How can you create genuine belief and motivation to achieve your goals?

Surprising as it may seem, in the normal course of business and life, and

perhaps especially in finance and treasury departments, people avoid these questions and no one else actually asks them.

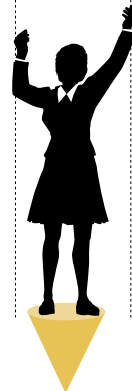
Everyone is expected to 'just work it out and get on with it'. This is especially the case if you're a leader – "Isn't that what we're paying you for?" Well, in one sense, yes, but it's not really that easy. Once a company has appointed leaders and has a team in place, it will have a significant investment and cost on its payroll. Wouldn't it be nice if the leaders and team suddenly achieved peak performance and delivered everything the shareholders could dream of?

The reality isn't like that, however. Every team is a diverse mix of individuals across a spectrum of capability and potential. Whether the company's focus is on short-term delivery of results or longer-term development of future leaders (hopefully a bit of both), there will be few that do not need to help their leaders reach 'peak performance', whatever that means for them. The return on investment (ROI)

on this cost will be much lower than it could be without a clear strategy to address it.

That's where coaching comes in. The benefits of coaching for any individual finance and treasury leader will depend on where they start. It may just be about becoming calmer, more energised and focused. It might be improving self-awareness and patience with others. It might be about developing better analysis and judgement abilities. Getting everyone aligned on a clear direction and developing a more effective approach to manage key stakeholder relationships are critical to the success of a finance and treasury leadership team. But too often they are lacking.

Other benefits of coaching include developing a new level of teamwork effectiveness, working collaboratively together, resolving conflict and, most importantly, following through on key strategic initiatives to drive value for the organisation. Ultimately, at organisation level, the aggregate benefits of coaching



SIX TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING A SUCCESSFUL COACHING STRATEGY

- ◆ Top-level leadership needs to buy in to coaching, sponsor it and communicate it. In other words, they need to 'walk the talk'.
- ◆ Coaching needs to be clearly articulated and communicated as part of business strategy and a performance culture.
- ◆ Develop a programme of training sessions (in person and online), coaching workshops and other supporting activities, for example, reading lists.
- ◆ Engage an external coaching partner for the senior and key coaching assignments (one-to-one and team). They will bring expertise, energy and direction – including training, and a 'train the trainers' approach.
- ◆ Find coaching champions – key leaders and opinion formers who are passionate about coaching.
- ◆ Make a hard link between coaching and talent, and development planning. Ensure that HR is aligned with the coaching programme.



are about bottom-line performance and results. This is about profit and cash, as well as improved motivation and engagement.

Setting up a coaching strategy

There are a number of points to consider when setting up a coaching strategy:

1. START AT THE TOP

The overall effectiveness of a coaching programme is directly proportionate to the seniority of the sponsorship of the programme. If the CFO (or, even better, CEO) is championing coaching, people will take it seriously and you will get results. The lower the level of sponsorship, and especially if it's just an HR initiative, the more it will struggle to cut through the organisational resistance. That said, whatever level of leadership you are at, you can get started with coaching, and as others see and hear the benefits, it can soon filter across the organisation.

2. COACH THE LEADERSHIP INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A TEAM

One-to-one leadership coaching can have a big impact. It is personalised to allow each individual to work through their issues, both work-related and personal, and examine how they are managing their own leadership effectiveness and their key stakeholder relationships. This coaching can entail some of the toughest conversations you will ever have. **Team coaching** can also have dramatic results. This is when leaders are brought together to stand back and look at the team's longer-term direction, mission and goals – and thrash out genuine alignment. It

is about figuring out how to work effectively together as a team and dealing with some of the interpersonal issues that were being swept under the carpet. As a result, some very challenging conversations will be had.

Blended approach. These interventions can be very powerful even when used in isolation. But if leaders can be coached individually AND as a team, there can be a multiplier effect. Issues that come up in the group could be taken offline in the one-to-one sessions, and vice versa. Deep-seated issues get properly resolved and people have a chance to work things through and discover new ways of dealing with challenges that had not been apparent before.

3. EMBED COACHING INTO THE PERMANENT CULTURE OF THE TREASURY FUNCTION

The most effective approach for rolling out the benefit of coaching is leadership take-up. When leaders realise the power of coaching and become motivated to train as coaches themselves, they then start to coach their people, and the benefit spreads. Coaches can be hired externally, and full-time coaches can be employed to deliver both one-to-one and team coaching. There will always be times when this expertise is required. But coaching is most impactful when it is deployed by leaders, on a day-by-day basis, in all their conversations with their people. And this has to start at the top. The conversations had by the most senior leader will set the tone for all other conversations right the way down the organisation.

The question is how to embed coaching as a capability and as a culture. [See the box,

opposite, for the six success factors.] It is also important to be mindful of organisational resistance to coaching, and to tackle the questions and objections that people raise. Here are some of the common ones:

- ◆ **What is coaching?** Provide a clear definition, models and a common language of coaching.
- ◆ **What is it not?** Clarify the boundaries that exist between coaching and therapy, mentoring and consulting.
- ◆ **How do you deal with the confidentiality issues?** Establish clear ground rules for contracting coaches and gaining employee consent. Set up a process for dealing with issues.
- ◆ **What is the ROI and payback on this?** Make the link to the bottom line clear. There are many benchmark case studies that demonstrate how coaching has delivered business results. Build evidence of performance and results improvements as the programme evolves, to ensure continued stakeholder support.

The end goal

Very few finance or treasury functions have implemented coaching cultures to date. So see this as an opportunity to create real competitive advantage. Make no mistake about coaching: ultimately, it is about profit and cash. ♥



Stuart Pickles is a finance and CFO coach, who is also a former finance director. For more, see www.aimhigherleadership.com