

## TOOLBOX TRIED & TESTED

# The first rule of Coaching Club...

Reed Exhibitions UK's Coaching Club is offering a safe supportive space where employees can practise and receive coaching. **Alison Mitchell** reports

By Alison Mitchell

### The tool

Coaching Club has been created to support the application of coaching skills in the Richmond, London office of Reed Exhibitions UK (RXUK). It is a simple yet powerful concept where employees can practise coaching in a safe and supportive environment. The Club meets for one hour every two weeks over a 12-week period, usually at lunchtime.

We introduced Coaching Club to:

- Develop coaching skills using the GROW model and other coaching tools
- Receive one-to-one coaching from other Club members
- Provide one-to-one coaching to other Club members
- Enhance management skills and career development opportunities
- Encourage people to join the new RXUK coaching network, designed to support colleagues in their development
- Support RXUK towards a feedback and coaching culture.

### HOW IT WORKS

The Club runs on Thursday lunchtimes once a fortnight in one of our larger conference rooms and is facilitated by

an experienced coach. There is a loose agenda for each session (see Figure 1).

Coaching Club is launched each January and October. Existing members are invited to attend as well as potential new members – the Club is open to anyone in Reed Exhibitions. The event is 'marketed' via a general invitation, mentioned in the L&D calendar and, most effectively, through word of mouth.

The first session of each new intake starts with an introduction to the Club's purpose, an outline of the guiding principles and a commitment from everyone to confidentiality, trust and openness to learning. We stress that this is not a training course, but more a way to try out coaching with trusted colleagues. At the first meeting we remind attendees of the GROW model, which they have all been exposed to in the company's 'Feedback and Coaching' course, mandatory for all employees.

Members are provided with a Coaching Toolkit, a copy of *The A-Z of Executive Coaching Techniques* by Michelle Lucas and a recommended reading list, including John Whitmore's *Coaching for Performance* and Nancy Kline's *Time to Think*.

Attendees are paired up randomly and preferably with someone they haven't worked with before. We decided not to do the more typical 'triad' work as we wanted Club members to try out coaching without feeling they were being monitored or measured. As outlined in the agenda, participants are encouraged to share the available time equally and simply work with each other in a coaching style.

Coaching Club is no respecter of hierarchy and it is quite normal to find a coordinator coaching a director. Generally, we are quite a traditional organisation and people can be quite conscious of 'grade', but we were keen from the outset that this didn't get in the way of how we approach coaching. The randomness of how we allocate coaching partnerships at each session seems to keep things fresh and no one notices their day job – we are all trainee coaches when we are in Coaching Club.

This arrangement works well because often it means that people are partnered with someone from another part of the business. Therefore, they have to be more curious and are more non-directive, as the coaching topic is often

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From an organisational perspective, the company holds up the Club as a beacon of innovation, as reinforcing the importance of coaching and feedback to staff

own skills during the sessions. Having said that, there are two other established Club members who have begun to share the facilitation, which means in future we will all participate in coaching our colleagues.

Organising Coaching Club has refuelled my own passion for coaching and has focused my mind on how to continue to grow my own skillset and knowledge. Before Coaching Club I had supervision on an ad hoc basis and had ruled out getting accredited because I wasn't sure of the benefits to me. Now that the coaching expertise is growing in the business, it feels appropriate to reassess that.

As a result, I've started attending group supervision sessions externally. Most of the other participants that attend are independent coaches, which is great for my development. I've also started logging my CPD and broadening my professional networks.

I am planning to become a member of an external Action Learning Set, also facilitated by my supervisor, which brings together professionals like me,

all keen to develop their coaching culture. I will be submitting my application for accreditation by the end of the year and, if (when) successful, will be celebrating my success with my fellow Coaching Club members.

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### **The clients**

*"The RX Coaching Club has provided me with the opportunity to develop skills and techniques with the ultimate goal of holding productive coaching conversations with my team"*

**Emily, business development manager**

*"The highly supportive and interactive environment helped me to develop key coaching skills, such as active listening, using open and powerful questions and seeing different perspectives"*

**Marco, buyer manager**

*"I met a number of colleagues from other teams during Coaching Club whose advice and prompting has helped me make positive adjustments to the way I conduct one-to-one sessions with my teams members, with productive results"*

**Mark, head of sales**

From an organisational perspective, the company holds up Coaching Club as a beacon of innovation, as reinforcing the importance of coaching and feedback to staff and as an approach which empowers individuals to engage in something they value.

From an individual point of view, many of the membership come back to Coaching Club every time we launch a new intake.

Others recommend their friends and colleagues to come along, citing their own positive experience in the process. When Coaching Club is not running, I am constantly asked when it will start again, how new members can get involved and whether I can add potential new members to the waiting list.

Unlike the first rule of Fight Club [from the film of the same name] – which is NOT to talk about Fight Club – our first rule of Coaching Club is to tell everyone about it and invite those with an interest to do the same. As you might expect, our members do honour client confidentiality, but they can talk about Coaching Club without talking about the conversations they have in their sessions.

I am very proud of Coaching Club and of all the members who have been brave enough to try something new. There's a clear return on investment to the business (except there hasn't really been any investment!) and we are definitely contributing to the evolution of our company's culture.

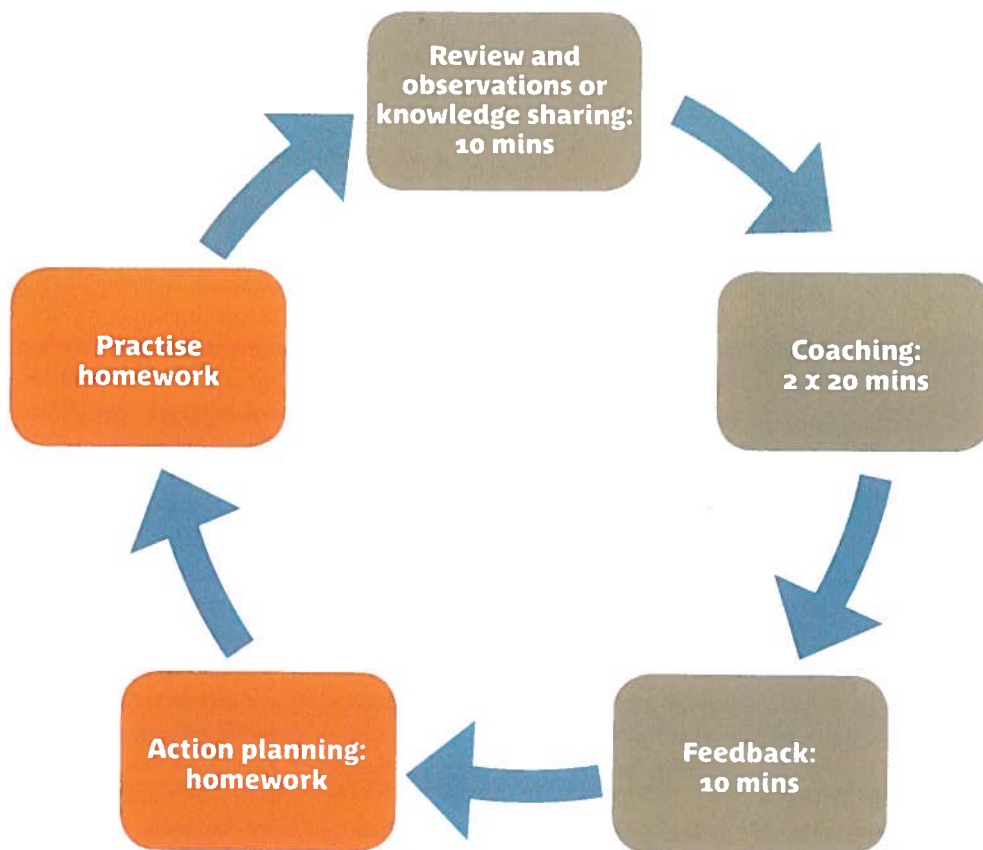
**Alison Mitchell**

### **UPSIDES**

- Coaching Club is open to everyone and encourages openness and empowerment in the business
- It develops confidence in individual members
- It's a relaxed, supportive and judgement-free environment

### **DOWNSIDES**

- It's seen as a bit of a luxury and therefore often de-prioritised in members' diaries
- Discussions can be superficial due to the limited time



**Figure 1: A Coaching Club agenda**

Coaching Club is no respecter of hierarchy and it is normal to find a coordinator coaching a director... no one notices their day job – we are all trainee coaches

something they have little experience of.

There are no rules about what members can coach each other on – sometimes the goal is work related and sometimes personal. We are careful to stress the importance of staying within the boundaries of coaching. On the rare occasion that an issue arises where someone needs more expert support, the facilitators are available to step in and take over or guide the discussion back to safer territory – and we always follow up where necessary.

**The Verdict**

**The Coach**

I had this idea after attending Reed Exhibitions' 'Feedback and Coaching' course and a subsequent discussion with the HR director about how to

embed these skills across the business. I didn't really know where it was likely to go or whether there would be an appetite for it.

I launched the first Coaching Club in January 2015 via an email to the business. The response was so good that we ran two groups concurrently – a Thursday group and a Friday group. The second time we ran it we had 32 members, which is around 10 per cent of our business in Richmond.

It's fantastic to see how the energy for coaching has grown. There's a great buzz in the room at every session. The downside of being the organiser/facilitator is that I 'float' and am available to answer questions when people get stuck or stray into giving too much advice. This means I don't practise my