

Evaluation Case Study: Coaching Certificate

Coaching and The Beech Certificate in Performance Development Coaching

At The Beech Centre, coaching is considered a key skill for any manager or leader to have, and is therefore one of the five areas of proficiency covered in the work and programmes that Beech offer, along with consulting, facilitation, leadership and personal resilience.

One of the many programmes offered is The Certificate in Performance Development Coaching, which is recognised at Post Graduate level by a Beech partner, The University of Teeside, and it was the first programme of its kind to be formally recognised by the Association for Coaching.

The course is aimed at Directors, Managers, Leaders, HR specialists, independent coaches and leaders looking to develop coaching skills, improve their performance and also enable sustainable development of the performance of the people they manage.

This case study is going to look at three programme delegates coming at the Coaching Certificate from different perspectives, and with different experiences about the impact the programme has had on their lives.

The certificate's delegates enter on to the programme from a variety of different backgrounds, for a variety of different reasons. So what motivated these delegates to come onto this course? What did they want to achieve?

Nicki Wisbey entered onto the programme as an independent, self-employed delegate. “I came on to the Coaching Certificate primarily to broaden my coaching knowledge and experience. I had no specific expectations coming onto the course other than this as I entered with an open mind. I had had a long conversation with members of the Beech team prior to enrolling and knew from that that this course would give me the opportunity to expand my coaching capabilities, which was what I was looking for.”

Matt Guiver participated in 2013 and also echoes this sentiment. “I enrolled on the certificate as I was looking for something to consolidate my previous experience. There are lots of courses out there and it’s hard knowing which one to choose. I came across this particular certificate after just so happening to pick up a print out of the course details that one of my colleagues had printed, and it was exactly what I was looking for.” Matt continues, “I wanted to do this course rather than receive some more standard managerial training because I was interested in consultancy and adopting a coaching approach, which I believed, in turn, would mean I would become a better manager and be able to give my staff more focused attention.”

Sarah Baker, another programme delegate explains her reasons for enrolling. “I chose to embark on this programme because I was looking to develop a formal grounding in coaching. I was in a managerial Learning and Development role and I felt this would help me to manage my team in a more effective way, and also allow me to develop a skills set which I could offer into the wider organisation.” Sarah continues, “The good working relationship that my organisation and Beech have acted as a catalyst for me to choose this programme- I had been on one of Beech’s two-day programmes previously and loved it and when wanting to find a longer term, deeper programme to improve my coaching capabilities, the Beech coaching certificate was my first and only choice.”

Beech describes the certificate, along with all of its other programmes as special and effective. They pride themselves on underpinning all of their work by using an open, collaborative and partnering approach, which allows each individual in the room to work out from the outset what they want to get out of the programme and how they can use a coaching style whilst working with others.

Matt describes his experience of this. “At first, I struggled to understand what was meant by this, but I managed to come to my own personal conclusion by the end of the end of the course. The fact that we were invited to be so open within the safe and confidential environment that the facilitator created for us was, I’m sure, a new concept for many of us and something completely different to anything we had experienced before.”

Sarah comments, “The way the programme was facilitated allowed for openness and honesty the whole way through, which I was grateful for. Over time, we developed a close, trusting relationship with both Chris (the facilitator) and others on the programme. Also, the fact that the programme had participants from different backgrounds meant that the openness truly worked- we could be comfortable and confident of confidentiality and what we discussed not impacting on our day to day work as we were not in a room full of our colleagues.”

The coaching certificate is a facilitated programme that centres around experiential learning. In using this approach, the facilitator is more of a guide, signposting the delegates towards things to think about and reflect upon but a delegate is not taught by them or given the answers- merely the opportunity to think about things in a different way. Experiencing new ways of thinking, behaving and working allows individuals to discover for themselves what change feels like, and Beech believes this is much more powerful than being given direction

on what one should do differently from an expert. This way, candidates can decide for themselves how they can adopt a suitable coaching approach, for example- if they choose to do this because they have experienced that it is an improved way of working, sustainable change becomes a lot more likely.

Nicki: "I really enjoyed experiencing what we were talking about as it really solidified it for me. We had lots of opportunity to practice adopting a coaching approach with others in the group and to ask questions, which I feel embedded our learning."

Sarah agrees, "There was a good balance in the course between being introduced to the theory and having time to play with this and practice coaching techniques. Experiential learning was used to great effect I am sure that the Certificate would not have been as effective had it have not have been used."

Many academic frameworks and models are used and discussed on the coaching certificate. These are designed to support an individuals learning. Illustrating and raising the delegates' awareness of behaviour themselves and others may adopt allows them to relate the work back to real-life situations in the workplace they can identify with.

Nicki shares her reflections on some of the models that she connected with. "I really got to grips with Transactional Analysis model, and the drama triangle really resonated with me too. I found it really easy to relate these back to real life situations I was experiencing. I am now observant of the characters that people play and recognising what I going on helps me to realise where I am attempting to be placed in a relationship by others and choose to act differently.

Matt also found the drama triangle resonated with him. "The drama triangle concept was very profound for me. It is very interesting to be aware of it and how to manoeuvre out of it. I even shared it with my boss who was fascinated by it too. I also felt that the coaching Triad was one of the most useful learning experiences I had. There was a marked improvement between where people were at the beginning of the course and where they were at the end- the awkwardness had disappeared and everyone was completely at ease."

Sarah comments, "There was a good mix of models covering a broad topic base. The GROW model resonated for me as it was a nice, simple model and we were given lots of techniques to go with it. We were also encouraged to keep a "learning log" which I found was an opportunity for personal reflection and for us to be honest with ourselves, to reflect on what went well and to learn from our experiences. This wasn't an easy task to begin with, but the structure of the programme enabled us to do this."

The "Beech" way of working is all centred around unlocking the "existing capabilities" of the delegates on the programme in order to ensure sustainable personal development is achieved; i.e. instead of viewing the certificate as a way to teach people how to become a coach, its more about working with the existing skills the individual has, such as listening, perception, awareness and curiosity and providing them with constructive feedback on ways to develop these skills. So, did our participants experience this?

Matt tells us, "The Beech way of working is definitely effective. It put us out of our comfort zones, and I am certain we all would not have learnt as much had we have not been challenged in the way we were. We were given helpful and balanced individual feedback and each person was given appropriate time to receive this, which isn't easy when you are constricted to a time frame."

Sarah agrees, "Critical reflection was encouraged all the way through, for example in the

coaching triads, the trust created in the room by the facilitator allowed the feedback to become more helpful and of a better quality as the course went on. The feedback was always well judged, constructive and non-confrontational, and Chris was a good role model for showing us how good feedback is given.”

Facilitator’s Viewpoint

Jill Savage is a member of Beech’s associate team and has facilitated multiple Coaching Certificates for Beech. “We see many leaders and managers come onto this programme, who believe they are currently paid to come up with solutions. The Coaching certificate allows these delegates to adopt a different mind-set which is much more non-directive; allowing their teams within their organisations to find out the answers for themselves. This all comes down to trusting that asking deep questions will create the opportunity for creativity to flourish. This course is not a “coaching skills” course- we encourage delegates to become practitioners.”

“I am told a lot by participants that they not only develop their coaching capability through this course but that they also get personal development out of it. Many describe applying the models to themselves, so for some, this can be literally life-changing.”

Jill continues, “Many models and frameworks we use seem to resonate with participants, especially The GROW model and the NLP perceptual positions, in which the participants get the opportunity to step into the shoes of different people. This allows them to learn to adopt a curious mind-set, to listen at a deep level and to ask incisive questions, which is 90% of Coaching skills- creating the situation to allow the Coachee to do the work.”

“The programme days are split into threes specifically to allow optimum learning to be achieved. Firstly, we reflect on the key learning that the delegates have experienced outside of the training room, be it with their coachees, coach, a book they’ve read or something within their learning log. We then explore a model, theory or demonstration of coaching and then finally do some coaching practice, because practice makes perfect! This mixture of theory and practical stimulates the different learning styles of the candidates; we also mould the course to fit the individuals’ needs by taking on board feedback from the mid term reviews in particular about what’s working for delegates and what we can do differently. We always listen and flex the course to meet the needs of the participants whilst keeping in line with the requirements of the Certificate, so it is an organic course in that sense.”

During the certificate, the candidates receive two supervision sessions from someone other than their facilitator, to allow them to reflect on their progress on the Certificate in a facilitated, confidential way. Chris Leggett, Head of Programmes at Beech often provides this supervision when he is not running the Certificate himself. “Supervision is a crucial element of good coaching development. It helps keep coaches safe in their practice and provides further opportunities for more learning to emerge from their experience.”

The Impact

So what have our delegates learnt off the back of the Certificate? Did they achieve what they set out to achieve?

Nicki gives us her view, “I have made massive progress since being on the Certificate- I wanted to learn the practice of coaching, and I have. I bring what I have learnt into everyday work, not just into my coaching work, as I now have my own clients. I tackle things differently in life now- I am less confrontational. I would not hesitate in encouraging people to join a

Beech programme- absolutely go and do it! I am already beginning to see a return on my investment and I hope that if you were to ask me in 5 years time, by then I will have experienced a significant return- if not it will only be because of me not keeping it up. The course has equipped me with all the tools required, now it is my personal choice to maintain these.”

Matt tells us his experience, “I could use what I learnt during my time on the Certificate with my team, especially sentiments from Nancy Kline’s book ‘Time to Think’. This made me take a different approach to my management meetings and I also tried to implement this learning into my family time too. This course embedded the seeds of learning I needed to develop my skills and I have the materials I received as a refresher. I feel proud to have the Certificate on my wall and through the course I met lots of interesting people from different walks of life whom I never would have encountered otherwise. I can absolutely see a return on my personal investment because I individually committed to the course- the onus is most certainly on you as an individual to enter into the approach but if and when you do, the result is very noticeable.”

Sarah shares her thoughts on the impact the certificate had on her, “The certificate really impacted on me in a variety of ways. I was able to use the techniques and models with my team. The transformation in the conversations that I am having with others is phenomenal- I am now empowering them to think for themselves because I realise that the answers are in them, rather than providing them with all the solutions myself.” Sarah continues, “These shifts are definitely sustainable- I have actually moved on from my previous organisation as myself and my team were required to take voluntary redundancy- this certificate enabled me to have a lot of good conversations with my team about finding new roles and positions- leaving behind a legacy. I definitely achieved what I wanted with the programme as I now understand what “good” looks like in a practical sense. I am delighted that I experienced this with Beech.”

What next?

So, what are our delegates planning to do next off the back of this certificate? What are the next steps of their personal development going to look like? Here at Beech, we offer a Diploma in Performance Development Coaching, but is that something our delegates are wishing to embark on?

Nicki explains, “I am definitely looking to do some more development, but I am not sure in which area yet. I am interested potentially in doing some more coaching or coaching supervision, so the Beech Coaching Diploma may be an option for me. I am also interested in Transactional Analysis- I have already been on TA101 (TA course) and I would certainly look into doing some more development in this area.” Matt tells us his next steps, “After finishing the Certificate, I have now left the organisation I was working for and have moved to Austria to set up my own consultancy practice, specialising in intercultural coaching and consultancy. I am aware that this is the beginning of my journey into a professional industry, and this course has given me a foundation of skills that I can build on. I intend to build on what I have started by way of further courses.”

What about Sarah? “This course has helped me to clarify that I want to manage a team of people in my next role. I am not looking to do any formal development at this stage as I want to wait and see where my next role takes me and what it requires from me but I would certainly not dismiss potentially doing the Beech Diploma in the future, or some other personal development. This is just the beginning of my journey.”