

Leader as Coach Program

Case Study & Participant feedback



Point Ahead

Point Ahead are the Middle Management Strategists.

Middle managers play a significant role in influencing the energy and commitment of the workforce to deliver organisational objectives and business outcomes. Their personal growth and confidence is vital to ensure engagement, performance and retention.

Point Ahead develops middle managers so that they can inspire and engage the people they lead. An inspired and engaged workforce delivers sustainable results for their organisation. Through group programs middle managers also learn how to capitalize on opportunities and resolve issues and challenges.

By coupling middle managers' focus on career advancement with their ability to develop the performance of their people Point Ahead is on track to deliver their mission: to ensure that Australian organisations are the leading places to work for generations to come.

The Three Elements

It is our contention that in order for a development activity to deliver significant improvement in business results there must be a focus on three key elements: learning, engagement and measurement. To achieve this we have developed a means of working that builds strong and trusting relationships, is inclusive, crosses silos and is linked to other organisational initiatives. In this way we ensure that each project or development activity we undertake is based on quality processes that deliver excellent outcomes and clear commercial benefit.

By emphasising individual reflection and focused application we increase middle managers personal insight and emotional intelligence. And as every program design is based on engagement of direct reports as well as senior managers the opportunity to develop a positive cultural shift is multiplied.

Michael Fahie

Karen Tweedie

Case Study

What follows is a Leader as Coach case study that illustrates this approach through an actual example. It demonstrates how a focused approach to middle management development can lead to sustainable organisational improvement.

The Leader as Coach Program was established at a major financial institution four years ago has produced some spectacular results. Because of this and the number of people who have undertaken the program, it is an ideal subject for a longitudinal case study.

Consistent with Point Ahead's focus of moving 'strategy to action', the Leader as Coach Program was designed to challenge leadership attitudes and beliefs in a manner that encouraged managers to develop both professionally and personally. It is based on the notion that adult learning is optimised by both participation and action within the learning process. It also recognises that learning is not necessarily instantaneous and that a change in thinking and behaviour can take time.

The underlying rationale is that attitudes are changed and behavioural skills acquired by consistent, real-world practice over time - much like how people acquire a second language.

The objectives of the Leader as Coach Program were to train participants to use coaching techniques to enhance their leadership "tool-kit". We equipped them with the underpinning knowledge-base for coaching, and the processes to enable them to coach. These tools and techniques can be used readily within the workplace, and contributes to a focus on commitment and high performance leading to career advancement.

By the end of a Leader as Coach course participants were able to lead more effectively, develop others as leaders, drive teamwork and collaboration, and deliver a coherent approach across the business. Their capacity to develop and adapt behaviours consistent with high quality work practices encouraged the growth of a culture that values shared learning and growth. Their access to the knowledge and skill required to implement the core competencies of the program, use coaching tools appropriately, effectively and strategically, and to apply a solution based approach to work challenges are things that will accompany them throughout their professional careers as well as enhance their private relationships. Their ability to demonstrate how to initiate



constructive and positive work practices sets them apart as organisational leaders of the future.

The Program

In January 2007, the bank's Head of Development and Improvement introduced the Leader as Coach Program. She recognised that a key factor of the business's ongoing commitment to sustainable people development was missing: namely the improvement of relationships between managers and the people for whom they are responsible. After considerable research she concluded that teaching managers coaching techniques would improve the managers' relationships with their reports, which in turn, should result in improved business outcomes such as increased productivity, talent retention, and reduced absenteeism. To this end the Leader as Coach Program was first run as a pilot project.

The programs for the bank ran for groups of up to 12 people. The commitment was for each person to participate for one hour per week for 35 weeks. Each program was conducted entirely as a series of teleconferences, which allowed a mix of people from every Australian state and overseas to participate in each cohort. The knowledge component was delivered by 19 tele-seminars, with additional practical coaching syndicates also conducted by telephone. A significant part of this program has been acknowledged by Swinburne University as prior learning for their Certificate IV to Master of Business Management pathway.

The Results

Following the project senior members of the business undertook an internal evaluation and concluded that at a very conservative calculation, net benefit of the program represented approximately \$30,000 per person per annum. 60% to 90% of the improved talent retention, reduced absenteeism and increased productivity were directly attributed to the skills learned on the program. Consequently Leader as Coach become an ongoing offering to middle managers

At the conclusion of the third program the Head of Development and Improvement wrote *"The Leader as Coach Program has proved to be the most effective employee development program I have witnessed to date. Individual*



outcomes are life changing and organisational outcomes are unprecedented.” (Helen Thompson)

A year later and with considerable excitement the General Manager, wrote, *“I’m very pleased to announce that the Leader as Coach program has recently been nominated for the prestigious International Coach Federation (ICF) Prism Award.*

Each year, the ICF recognises organisations that have promoted excellence and business achievement through their commitment to coaching as a leadership strategy. Selection criteria for the Prism Award include Effectiveness, Impact, Strategic Significance and Return on Investment of the coaching program and we have submitted a comprehensive nomination form to demonstrate and support the achievement of these criteria.” (Phil Davis)

Sustainable Results

The program has now been running for four years. As part of Point Ahead’s quality control we contacted past participants to obtain their answers to the three following questions:

1. How did you find the actual course
2. What value (if any) has doing the course added to your work and home life?
3. To what extent do you still use the techniques and concepts covered in the course?

Below are some extracts of what participants have said.

“The course has been an eye opener for me. I didn't think phone coaching would work. I think it is excellent way of learning especially for this course. The way the course is set up with feedback channels from others observing is very good as it reinforces the message through another channel.” (Mark Ley, Academy and MTP)

“As a participant of the pilot program I was initially uncertain of the value of the theory content in the first four modules and the program prework, as most of the concepts were familiar to me from other formal studies. Once we commenced the syndicate coaching I saw the value in translating the formal framework into practical examples. Bringing real situations as coachee into an environment where both coach and coachee are learning and building a trust relationship was very powerful. To be able to walk away with practical actions that could be debriefed the next week was also insightful as a coach.



A tangible result from the program which was evident in the quality of the commentary from my direct reports in our 360 degree Leadership Behaviours Survey. During my time as a people leader of a business unit, the commentary in the feedback from my direct reports indicated a greater level of engagement, seeking to understand individuals motivators more deeply, and an interest in assisting and empowering them to find their own solutions.” (Nicole Winter, Release and Integration Manager)

“The course had great content. The interactive coaching sessions done in blocks were probably the best part just because you could put theory to the test and sometimes with learning that is the part afterwards that is missing. There are still little phrases and questions from the GROW model that I use now in my work life and even in my private life when talking to my husband about people leadership and coaching that he has to deal with as well. While not all the concepts I have taken on in everyday life, the whole program does pop into my head quite often after all this time which I think is because of the time commitment you have to invest in the program which means it is embedded straight away.” (Nicky Bolton State Manager)

“I can't explain or emphasise enough on how it made me really think about things so much differently than I have done previously. I enjoyed the way the course was set out and our weekly meetings which enabled us to share wins, do role plays that were sometimes confronting yet so beneficial to explore the topics. Your experience Michael and the way that you would introduce a topic was also very effective & impressive. Due to this different way of thinking about things, I was able to change my approach to things in both the work & home environment. It has reduced the stress that I sometimes used to feel in certain situations (not that stress is completely removed from my life!) but both at home and work it's provided a clearer direction when it comes to leading people or managing people in my life. The topic around every system is perfect was effective and I continue to use this as well as the difference between Responsibility vs Blame - this was huge for me as I believed that they were one in the same until this session.” (Joanne Musumeci, Operations Manager)

“Absolutely fantastic. Loved every minute of it. The modules are great and targets some of the key elements that's required when coaching direct reports and peers/ business partners. It also teaches you skills how you can make a total turnaround in



a conversation that is not going very positively. The GROW model is particularly useful.

Whilst initially I thought the cohort syndicate coaching using the GROW concept multiple times might be a bit of overkill. The end result was quite different. It was actually very beneficial as it helped embed the concept into your everyday life. The opportunity to get together weekly and share learnings and also listen to the changes that the group has made during their week is rewarding. I would recommend this to all people leaders and business leaders. Although I don't have direct reports reporting to me currently, the skills learnt via this course has assisted in my discussions with Heads of and senior leaders in the Business and Business partners. It was also encouraging that some of the coaching skills I had developed over the years were validated through the program. It has made many positive changes. Particularly the language style used. Each leader as coach module can be used both in your professional and personal life. I believe even with family and friends there are coaching moments.

This program provides you the skills to grab those opportunities and make a positive difference in their lives too. Which not only rewards the person concerned but also yourself. I have also registered to be a mentor to lending staff who are looking to be a people leader. As I strongly believe I can impart some of the skills learnt. Leader as Coach has taught me the difference between a mentor and a coach. I also have more confidence when dealing with difficult situations and conversations.” (Manjula Gunawardena, Risk & Compliance Standards Manage)

“I have found the course to be useful, interesting and practical. I enjoy hearing stories from others and using some of those things I pick up on. The program has added great value in my work life in allowing me to use some of the learnings in my daily job. It's interesting and exciting to use some of the learnings in a real 1-on-1 coaching session, and to be able to realise what I have learnt can actually work. In 1-on-1 coaching sessions I use the GROW model, I like seeing the team member come up with their own solutions and actions. I think they like it too. I have also learned to use effective feedback and ensuring that I have facts to back up what I am saying. I realised that is so important when it comes to feedback otherwise it is just seen as an opinion.” (Huong U Manager – Distribution Support)



"I found the course challenging and would recommend highly to anyone. There are certain value drivers in the course I use today, about commitments and the steps in place to get there. I would use the techniques from the course daily, I have been promoted since and the concepts and techniques have helped me greatly even when I am now dealing with a different level of audience." (David McFadyen Operations Manager)

"As a co-facilitator, I continued to learn new techniques whilst sharing some of my coaching experiences with the coachees. Michael, your ability to articulate concepts in a simple, easy to comprehend manner makes for an engaging and interesting session."

The Leader as Coach Program has been the single greatest influence on my career as a people leader. Coaching works! As long as you are prepared to consistently review coaching tools and techniques, implement and reflect on the outcomes, I'd recommend it to anyone looking to improve the engagement and results of their team. At home, I have applied many of the techniques to the point where I think a lot more deeply about what is happening and explore the possibilities and/or responses with my wife. The outcomes of our conversations have been much better and engaging. Anyone that is serious about people leadership and achieving great things, the Leader as Coach Program is a must.

I use these coaching techniques every day in work and personal life. I love coaching to the point that I now have a Cert IV in Workplace & Business Coaching and am close to finishing the Diploma." (Jonathan Millen, Operations Manager Facilitation)

"Leader as Coach was a revelation. The concept of any form of training done via teleconference was a new one to me, and frankly I wasn't convinced that it would work. The thought of taking 10-12 strangers and putting them together to learn in an 'artificial' environment seemed like an odd way to go about facilitating learning in such an important area. By the end of the very first session I was not only convinced, I was hooked! Every week that I spent with my fellow participants was a great investment in my learning as we shared achievements, new understanding and some amazing 'a-ha' moments. The benefits of the program became even clearer as I gathered return on investment data from each participant and I gladly agreed to co-facilitate future cohorts before my own group had even finished."



The value to my workplace was immeasurable. Not long after I commenced the program, my workplace began a scale-down operation in preparation for the bulk of the work (and jobs) to move to an offshore provider. In my capacity as a training manager I was expected to take a lead in preparing the staff for employment outside the organisation, some of these staff had been with the company for over 30 years. As a participant in Leader as Coach I was able to draw on my learning and also the knowledge and experience of my fellow participants to plan a successful transition for the affected staff.

As for the home life, I have often used a quick version of the GROW model to help my husband and friends when they are struggling to make a decision. While not specifically coaching them, I have been able to give them the tools to come to a way-forward when in the past I would simply have told them what they should do.

The GROW model is something I use constantly as a self-coaching tool. What is my goal here? What is the reality of my situation? What options do I have and which one will give me a way forward to achieve that goal? As a stay-at-home Mum (or domestic goddess if you prefer) who is seeking to return to work I ask myself these questions constantly when looking at positions vacant.” Kirsten Radunz

“Very effective. Great value, I regularly use the GROW model with my direct reports and keep in touch with my syndicate coach. Regularly [use the techniques and concepts] with my direct reports and used the GROW model in a recent leadership assessment program (capability uplift project) in which I scored 8 out of 10 (HIGH) in the market, part of the assessment was a coaching opportunity.” (Angelo Dimitriou. Senior Operational Risk Manager)

I was lucky enough to be a participant in the pilot of Leader as Coach so I understand how valuable the skills you all now have will be in your future careers and also in your personal life.

For me personally I was able to use this powerful tool to achieve amazing outcomes for my daughter who was recovering from cancer. Later this month she will graduate from Melbourne University and this would not be the case if this course did not happen when it did and provide me with the ability to use powerful questioning and the GROW model to help her make important decisions about her future. (Bernie Risk & Compliance Manager)



Some Conclusions

To date Point Ahead has run 14 programs within the business and since we began this process we have gained considerable additional expertise and experience.

The program's initial design has been shown to be sound. And the following are some of our learnings.

1. It is essential that participants view the program as an opportunity for development not a means of remedying leadership defects.
2. The level of focus and passion of both the facilitator and the internal organiser is crucial to the program's success.
3. Constant evaluation and review is a necessity. It needs to be embedded in the program, not an afterthought.
4. The coaching and human behavioural concepts discussed must be clear and presented in 'plain' English.
5. There is a need for constant reinforcement and reiteration of key skills and techniques.
6. Every skill taught needs to be applied, practiced and reflected upon.

A most pleasing aspect of the program has been the level of participant commitment. It has been so great in some cases that a person has phoned in to a teleconference when on leave or away for other reasons, including temporary overseas postings.



Resources

Bridges, William: Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change (1995)

Fahie, Michael: Team Coaching A Case Analysis. Paper presented at the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches Conference, Vancouver Canada, March 2007

Hames, Richard: The Five Literacies of Global Leadership (2007)

MacKeracher, Dorothy: Making Sense of Adult Learning (2004)

Pretty, Jules N et al: Participatory Learning and Action: A trainer's guide (1995)

Rock, David and Schwartz, Jeffrey: The Neuroscience of Leadership Melbourne ICF Conference paper (2007)

Rodgers, Alan: What is the difference? A new critique of adult learning and teaching, (2003)

Rodgers, Jenny: Participatory Practices in Adult Education (1989)

Smith, Robert: World Bank Seminars