

Royal College of Nursing Invests in Coaching Culture



When Julie Carrington joined the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) as Organisational Development Manager in 2006, she discovered that, despite investing in a management development programme, the RCN did not have a mechanism in place to empower employees to make changes to their professional development. Looking to develop these competencies and create an experiential learning culture within the organisation, Julie turned to coaching and i-coach academy to help achieve the results.

Why coaching?

From her previous experience as Management Development Executive and Training and Organisational Development Manager (and Internal Lead Coach) at the BBC, Julie had seen first-hand the benefits that coaching could produce. Julie commented that

“Coaching is a powerful tool and a powerful way of learning. Its biggest impact is in the confidence people gain from the process of coaching and recognising their own abilities. Coaching also provides that validated space to think, which is an important element of leadership and management.”

In addition to simply investing in management capabilities, the RCN was in the process of embarking upon a major period of change.

“We needed our managers to develop a more agile way of thinking that would allow them to adapt to this change,” Julie said.

The coaching style of management to be introduced was to align with management competencies and become an expectation for RCN management moving forward.

Who was the target?

With the support of executive management, Julie sought to introduce a coaching style into the Management Development Programme. The first step was to develop an internal coaching programme to train a number of internal management coaches who would then coach participants that attended the next Management Development Programme. The coaching programme was specifically pitched at senior management (not executive management) who were perceived to be key influencers within the organisation and had the capacity to influence culture.

Why i-coach academy?

One of the key benefits that Julie sought from engaging i-coach academy was its positioning within the coaching community. With accreditation from the European Mentoring and Coaching Council and the Institute of Work Based Learning at Middlesex University, an international presence and a philosophy that didn't focus on a 'one model fits all' approach made i-coach academy the most appealing coaching provider.

“I felt that the coaching had to be received over a period of time, to allow RCN managers to reflect and practice the new skills that they were acquiring. While I looked into a number of other providers, i-coach academy offered the most flexible approach in running an eight day programme over a number of months,” Julie said.

The Programme Design

In January 2007, the first RCN Internal Coach Programme commenced with 15 senior managers choosing to participate.

The programme involved three modules:

Module 1 learning theory, self-insight, coaching skills, performance theory and ethics

RCN Invests in Coaching Culture with i-coach academy



Module 2 learning review, appreciative inquiry, solutions focus, Cognitive Behavioural Coaching

Module 3 learning review, assessment and ethics and contracting.

To reinforce the learning, in between modules, managers were required to complete coaching fieldwork including self and coaching session evaluations.

The programme was structured around the learning cycle, so a crucial component was participants' ability to apply their learning. Each manager/internal coach trainee was therefore required to find two clients within the organisation with whom they could coach over five sessions. The subsequent modules drew on the learning managers gained from their application of theory and skills in coaching sessions.

As industry research suggested that receiving coaching is a strong re-enforcement of learning in coaching programmes, each manager was also assigned a coach and required to receive four coaching sessions. Finally, to ensure a continuous learning cycle, facilitated learning review days were held to allow managers to share their experiences and reflect on their learning.

Programme Outcomes

From the early stages of the programme, Julie and her team received anecdotal feedback that a shift in conversations was happening at the senior management level. Graduate responses have been positive particularly in terms of the learning outcomes from the modules. Those who completed the programme have reported a significant difference in the way their clients moved forward and have attributed this to being able to implement what they have learnt through the programme.

Feedback included:

"The programme has been very helpful in day to day management."

"It was the most enjoyable and professional course I have been to at RCN in 5 ½ years."

"It was clear and challenging. The challenge for delegates was to be different in our responses and thinking."

Evaluation of i-coach academy

Julie is very satisfied with the way i-coach academy and their Programme Leader, Eunice Aquilina have approached the RCN programme.

"What was excellent was i-coach academy's flexibility with how people were responding, as well as their attention to how RCN wished to see coaching sit within the organisation's culture. The programme delivered was very responsive to the RCN goals and needs," Julie said.

Looking to the future?

The RCN is committed to developing coaching within their organisation, another Internal Coach Programme is planned. The use of internal coaches and training on coaching techniques as well as other learning initiatives such as action learning sets and work-based projects have been integrated into the design of the Management Development Programme to continue to support managers develop the skills they need to manage the culture change programme within the RCN. Having experienced the success of coaching in two organisations, Julie is confident in the benefits that coaching can offer. The key to success, according to Julie, is the organisation's objectives, where they are and whether they are ready to commit to coaching.

"I have no doubt in the value that can be gained through coaching," Julie said.