

Bournemouth and Poole College

One-to-one LSIS coaching case study



“As a result of the intervention with the Executive Team coaching is now firmly embedded in the leadership culture of the College. This has helped us develop a more helpful multi dimensional approach to staff engagement. “

Lawrence Vincent

Summary

LSIS coaches were used to work with the College’s executive team as part of a bespoke plan to move the college forward and further improve student outcomes. The executive were challenged and supported to reflect on their own and other’s performance, and to develop their own strategies linked to the BPC vision. Using a solutions-focused approach the legacy has encouraged other staff to be reflective and come up with their own solutions.

About Bournemouth and Poole College

The Bournemouth & Poole College (BPC) is one of the largest further education colleges in the UK with more than 17000 learners studying a range of academic and vocational qualifications. In 2011 BPC won praise from Ofsted for its teaching and learning, including its apprenticeship success rates and ‘outstanding’ range and quality of partnership working. It prides itself on its student engagement and in 2010 and 2011 won ‘Leading the Learner Voice’ awards. BPC have developed an innovative approach to ensure student employability. They are the first UK college to develop a REED NCFE partnership bringing the employment agency into the college. Alongside REED staff they have E labs, a meeting room, dedicated PCs and a smart classroom where students can job search, find out about opportunities and develop employability skills such as interview practice and CV writing. Students can also take an employability qualification alongside their vocational qualifications and A levels.

The Challenge

The Principal, Lawrence Vincent, was an advocate and user of coaching himself. With a new team in place at BPC he took a decision that the executive would be offered coaching to develop together, do in depth work and build the executive as a team with the aim of developing BPC into a contemporary College. Sharon Collett, Vice Principal (Academic and Student Affairs) and newly appointed to her role, was one of those offered coaching.

The outcomes

Sharon points to a direct correlation because Teaching and Learning is about everyone in an organisation so:

“when I am working with my direct reports I would be drawing from a coaching approach, using what I learned with the people I am managing to help them move forward. Coaching has helped through having time to reflect on where we were, how to improve the experience of the students and how to deploy the staff to do that.”

She adds that the need for clear communication on the vision and signposting the challenges ahead came from a place of reflection allowing her to think ahead to put the key elements in place.

In particular Sharon believes the use of a Solutions Focus approach was invaluable and a key part of the coaching legacy. It helped her visualise where she wanted to be and compare that to where she was. It also helped her confirm where the college needed to be and then discuss that with those she worked with so they could determine:

“where they wanted to be, where they thought they were there on that journey and the steps they needed to take to get to the end result. Most people can visualise that type of approach. The further away someone was from where the college needed to be, the more I wondered whether they were on the ‘right bus’. Then I thought about how to help them - what can you do tomorrow to move forward?”

She has encouraged those around her to use a similar approach and all training has been reviewed with a view to seeing what will most aid change and support positive outcomes.

The activity

All the executive team were offered six sessions of face-to-face executive coaching. They selected from LSIS-accredited coaches available.. The team were also sent an LSIS coaching guide together with possible questions to ask shortlisted coaches during initial chemistry conversations. The coaching took place over the course of one academic year. Sharon says they chose LSIS coaches because of its reputation, having had some very good support over the years. She saw coaching as about reflection and challenge:

“It’s about understanding other people and what I need to tap into, to help them perform. It’s about understanding myself fully and having various models I can use to help in various situations. It’s essential to prioritise the time to develop and practice approaches using real life experiences, to review and plan again. It’s about prioritising leadership.”



“Academic training is essential, but coaching is about applying knowledge to the situation you are in and ... reviewing the new skills. In that way they become more embedded rather than just academic. Also it’s a safe way to work on areas of development, to challenge yourself and the things that you think you are good at and have the way you deal with things put under a microscope.”

Coaching compared to other change interventions

Sharon believes that coaching is the most effective way of supporting change.

“It was a more personal journey. I was able to bring back concerns that I needed to work on and find ways to improve and check for effectiveness.”

She believes that the one-to-one nature of it is instrumental, coupled with a safe environment way from work, a trusting atmosphere, with a series of sessions over a specific time period, which enabled her to monitor developments. While it is a more expensive option than some developmental support, Sharon argues that

“The cost of a college not being effective is extremely high, so the investment in the senior leaders is critical; it will help us to use particular approaches, to manage the continual change that is required. And I think that the staff and students in the college deserve to have strong leaders who are keen to keep developing. Only in that way can we get the college to provide everything we want it to in the community.”

Lessons learned

Sharon says:

“I would always recommend coaching, with the right person in the right environment and with the right attitude.”

- You need to be able to select the coach you feel is the right coach for you.

- You need to be open to coaching – Sharon says it worked well for her because she was open to it.
- You need to think you have something to learn.
- You need to invest the time.
- You need to engage in it:

“whole-heartedly; don’t just dip your toe in the water.”

- To be most effective it needs to be done with the right conditions e.g. for Sharon it was to go off site, sit, relax, have a motivated and skilled coach which she felt created the perfect situation for a successful coaching outcome.

She adds that if you feel you haven’t got the time:

“It’s hard to understand the benefits until you have experienced them...The legacy is I have a toolkit I can pull out and use where appropriate so I am much more equipped than I was previously to manage and lead in certain situations. It’s something about letting people work through their own situations not telling them how to do it, supporting them from the side-lines to come up with their own solutions not jumping into the swimming pool and both drowning! Because I have worked up through the system, it could have been easier to tell them what to do – but I have learned to stand back and help them come up with own solutions rather than telling.”