

LSIS CITY AND ISLINGTON COLLEGE case study

March 2012

“Managers need time to think and someone to discuss their ideas with, which may get lost in the day to day rushing around that everyone does. The College understands the need to afford managers the space to enable them to work out a more creative and proactive approach to managing change in the workplace and this is having a positive effect on our culture.”



Summary

City and Islington College has introduced coaching systematically for all its leaders to provide tailored and individual support alongside more generic training. It is used to support change and has improved managers' confidence and competence, helped a process of culture change. To underpin this the College has already trained 7 internal coaches through the LSIS Advanced Coaching programme accredited at ILM Level 5 and plans to use LSIS to train a further 5 internal coaches on-site in 2013 as part of an on-going programme endorsed by the College's senior team. City and Islington College will also host LSIS's first southern coaching seminar in July 2012.

The college

City and Islington College is an inner city FE college which has excellent achievement rates leading to it being graded outstanding by Ofsted in 2008. Since that time, the College was also awarded Beacon status in recognition of the high quality of its teaching and learning. The College employs about 1000 staff and is spread over five centres in Islington, North London.

The challenge

When Learning and Development merged with the HR department the College wanted an integrated approach to ensure maximum effectiveness both in the use of resources and in impact for managers. This resulted in a more tailored, individual approach to training concentrating on supporting leaders to manage change and performance. Coaching was the answer to HR's question "What is the investment we can make that has the greatest impact on an individual's management approach?" With the support of the Senior Management Team coaching is now being used to support staff who have a leadership role.

The outcomes reported

The College does evaluation before, during and after the coaching, and also involves the coachee's manager. Typical quotes from coachees are:

- *“Greater confidence and affirmation in decision making capabilities”*
- *“It was a very positive experience and I learned a great deal”*
- *“I have found the sessions very helpful in my professional role and I am developing strategies to manage my own time and to prioritise.”*

Claire Collins, one of the first two LSIS-trained internal coaches and Head of HR says *“Managers who have received coaching feel much more confident as a result and develop skills that take them forward on their own. The feedback we have had from managers has been really positive.”* The College is going through Investors in People after Easter 2012 and is using coaching as very strong evidence of the College’s commitment to staff development.

Tracey Gardiner, recently promoted to Deputy Director, Teaching and Learning and also responsible for student engagement believes: *“Having coaching skills enables individuals and organisations to be more effective around communication.”* Tracey was motivated to become an internal coach to explore new models and approaches to empowering and enabling students and staff. *“The vision is to develop the use of coaching skills to engage and motivate learners, facilitate independent learning and empower students to overcome barriers.”*

Tracey feels that coaching has enhanced her role as a manager. For example revising the College’s self-assessment review she used *“a coaching mind-set, focusing on coaching questions to enhance the process of reflection and the quality of thinking. I used to use “Why” a lot but now I rarely use it favouring “How”, “What” and “Who” which improves the clarity of your thought and communication and the quality of the information you get back”*. Tracey regularly uses LSIS-learned coaching strategies and techniques such as exploring metaphors, using perceptual positioning (looking at situations from different perspectives), and solutions-focus, including questions such as *“What’s going well, what would you like to talk about, what would you like support with, what are the risks, how will you know it’s been successful, what will the impact be?”*

The activity

Fiona Evans Director of HR and Marketing who was already a qualified coach decided to undertake the LSIS coaching programme to ensure she was able to sponsor the development of the initiative within the College. Fiona says that *“Getting the buy in and commitment of the senior management team for the development and promotion of a coaching culture in the college was crucial to the success of the scheme. Without senior management support, it would have been both difficult for managers to get time off to participate in the scheme but also to see it as a priority when there are increased work pressures.”*

Currently internal and external coaches are used to deliver coaching but, over time, this will shift to a mainly internal model. To achieve this the College will continue to use the LSIS Advanced Coaching Programme, which consists of face-to-face modules, assignments, action learning sets, reading materials and individual coach mentoring/supervision to support client work and assignments. City and Islington sees coaching as a really positive intervention, moving from an idea that coaching is used as a tool when people are not performing well or as “last resort.” For example coaching is routinely offered to senior managers, to those new to role and to build team relationships. Staff are now actively requesting to be coached and recommending it to one another.

Why LSIS?

Claire Collins, Head of HR says *“What impressed us was the standard of the LSIS training. It was very rigorous and the quality of the trainers and their experience is invaluable. The feedback on my coaching practice was very insightful and resulted from them having huge experience of coaching. The course was hard work and challenging to fit around a job, but now we wouldn’t want anyone but an LSIS trained coach. They come from the same place, speak the same language and have the same standards, and that’s really important for the credibility of coaching in the organisation. The assignments we completed lead to a depth of understanding that we would not have achieved if we had just done a practical course”*.

Tracey talks of *“The confidence that was communicated through the tutors in terms of their knowledge as professional practitioners and the time for coach mentoring supported my development as a coach.”* Tracey appreciated *“the delivery of the sessions, full days, off site and mixed method of delivery – practice and theory. Because the lead tutor was so experienced, she was very responsive to the groups learning and adapted her delivery accordingly.”*

Coaching compared to other change interventions

Claire believes coaching is effective *“Because you are working together on managing the change rather than change being imposed. It’s all about empowerment. Coaching enables you to find creative solutions, take ownership and see the bigger picture”*.

Tracey adds *“Because it is led by the individual who is being coached, it’s about them taking ownership for solutions and changing, which means they really do change and put new ideas into practice. Particularly when coaching managers, it changes how they then manage and work with their teams.”*

Lessons learned

Fiona says *“It was really important to explain to management how coaching would support the college’s management processes and support other developmental programmes already in place such as succession planning, talent management and career development in terms of helping managers meet performance gaps.”* The cost of not investing in coaching would have meant that managers may not have had the opportunity to develop to their full potential and maintain high levels of performance during periods of intense change within the sector.

Tracey encourages people to introduce coaching into their institutions though underlines how important it is that *“senior managers are on board and supportive to maximise the impact, by providing strategic direction to coaching initiatives.”*

Claire’s advice to people is *“You should do it. It changes how you look at learning and development. I think 4 or 5 coaching sessions can make such a difference to how someone feels about their role. Offering staff coaching makes them feel that the College is investing in them as an individual, which can really improve motivation”*.