

Coaching for success in Business

Sir Alex Ferguson, Clive Woodward, Dave Brailsford and Andy Flower – just a few of the professionals who have been recognised as great sporting coaches in recent years. What about you, do you consider yourself to be a great coach? In fact, do you use the term “coach” at all when you think of yourself in your role as a leader?

Coaching in sport is synonymous with leadership in business. Both disciplines require the same skills, aptitudes and attitudes. Yet rarely do you hear leaders referring to themselves as coaches. It's not part of the corporate language after all. Coaching in business is often a term restricted to describing specific training interventions. However, if you can move away from that mindset and instead see every interaction you have with your people as a coaching interaction, you will be able to inspire massive improvements in performance and engagement.

No one is better qualified to talk about the power of great coaching than one of the newest members of the Raise the Bar team, UK Athletics Head Coach Charles Van Commenee. Well known for his tough and demanding coaching style, Van Commenee has seen huge successes throughout his coaching career.

He is widely respected for his ability to turn around the performances of underperforming athletes, a skill which surely is as highly prized in the corporate world as it is in sport. Last year Charles guided the previously under-performing British Athletics team to be the most successful British team ever to compete in the European Championships. Next year the hopes of the nation will rest firmly on his shoulders as he oversees the British Athletics team in the 2012 London Olympic Games.

No stranger to pressure, the tough talking Dutchman has a no compromise approach and our corporate leaders can learn a lot from his demanding style when looking to coach performance and increase accountability.



Charles is a firm believer in starting every relationship or performance cycle with the same 5 step approach, and he recently shared this with Raise the Bar's Head of Learning and Development, Gayle Robling;

Step 1: Review the previous year's performance.

Work with your team member to explore whether objectives have been achieved? How were they achieved? Which goals were exceeded? Which ones were not achieved? Why not?

Step 2: Set the Benchmark.

Research great performers in your given field, both within and beyond your own region, organisation or specialism. Identify what differentiates them, what do they do to ensure that they win?

Clearly a business leader's ability to research the "competition", or great performers outside of their sphere of business, is more challenging than it is for Van Commenee. But, even just analysing great performers in your own team or organisation can provide extremely useful information.

Then, with your team member, you will need to analyse the difference between last year's performance, attitude and behaviours with those of the great performers you have benchmarked.

Step 3: Bridge the gap.

Explore with your team member what they are going to need to do in the next 12 months to close that gap.

A key component to Van Commenee's approach here is that the individual themselves must come up with some very precise answers about how they are going to bridge that performance gap. Personal accountability is a cornerstone of Van Commenee's no nonsense approach to coaching. As a coach and a leader, encouraging your team members to actively contribute to their own performance analysis and solution research is a powerful tool. Request detailed actions and strategies from your people to ensure you create a meaningful coaching plan together.

Step 4: Set goals

Again, your team member must take a lead role in identifying their goals and the milestones they need to reach en route to achieving their goals.

Unsurprisingly, Van Commenee insists on goals which are clear, measurable and stretching – concepts very familiar to the corporate world. A key aspect here is to ensure that you keep a record of these goals, the agreed coaching plan for the forthcoming year.

Step 5: Agree conditions

Controversially, Van Commenee will finish this process by asking his athletes to agree on certain conditions and commitments they must adhere to consistently throughout the year if they are to retain their funding from UK Athletics.

This is not something commonly seen in the corporate context. How often are your team members asked to identify key actions that they must take over the next 12 months in order to maintain their current status, responsibilities, pay, benefits, or even to retain their job? And yet, this aspect of personal accountability and open acknowledgement of a minimum expectation can work just as well in the world of business. Research has shown that transparency and clarity about minimum standards and consequences of non-delivery of those standards is highly motivational and effective in driving both performance and engagement.

As commercial leaders and coaches we can learn a lot from Van Commenee's experience and methods. By adapting our leadership approach to become more like a sports coach we can inspire our people to turn out gold medal winning performances time and again.

This 5 step approach is just one element of the vast array of coaching tools and techniques Charles has developed and tested throughout his hugely successful career as a coach and inspirational leader.

If you want to explore how you can apply the lessons of sports coaching in the commercial arena and find out more about Charles or get involved in one of our "Building Inspirational Coaches" programmes then please contact us at enquiries@raisethebar.co.uk, visit us at www.raisethebar.co.uk or call us on **+44 151 426 0110**