

Chris Bailey  
from the company Vertu

# A personal view of the Community Coaching Project

For a couple of years now I have had an interest in coaching and have read a few books on the subject. It has always struck me as an amazing tool to possess to be able to listen to someone, and assist them in finding clarity to any problem they may have.

Having attended the Nokia Coaching for Success course, which was a great starting point for coaching, I felt I needed more. After two days of learning the basics and some practical role play, there was some what of a void for me in the following months.

I decided I wanted to learn more and develop my coaching skills further, and that's when I saw the advert from HRD offering the chance to participate in a year long Coaching project that had been offered to Nokia by an external company called Employee Volunteering.

The idea of the project is that local companies, such as Nokia/Vertu, sponsor a number of employees to participate in the project that benefits the local community. The project focuses on assisting young people who may have struggled in life, either through learning disabilities, unstable up-bringing, and possibly who have been in trouble with the police, in either returning to, or continuing in education or into employment. There are also adults who have been identified as requiring some assistance in their future, such as return to work parents, immigrants integrating into the community and also long term unemployed people returning to work.

The one common factor with all these people is that they have all committed to make a change in their lives and have taken the first step by enrolling on the project to move forward.

To me it is a win / win situation for all parties. Nokia/Vertu will benefit by being recognised for their input towards the local community and will also benefit

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make a difference  
make a **big** difference

from the coaching skills that I will develop over the period of the project. For myself, I will be awarded a Level 3 Certificate in Workplace Coaching & Mentoring from the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) upon successful completion of the project, and also I will gain invaluable experience coaching first hand with the people involved. The other personal satisfaction for me is the knowledge that I will make a difference to someone's future.

As for the participating youths and adults, they will benefit from having assistance and clarity brought to their personal goals, and the fact that they have a personal coach for the year to help them.

As part of the process to gain the certificate from the ILM, we need to produce three assignments. The first assignment was 1000 words document to be sure we understood the theory side of coaching. The next assignment was six hours work based coaching, where we coach someone from the workplace and complete a log for each session, and this gives us the opportunity to reflect on our coaching style, and how coachee's can differ with their learning style, goal setting etc.

The final assignment is to produce a reflective log and coaching diary for 30 hours. This is where we coach the members of the local community, our assigned coachee's.

The team of coaches on this course has been made up from twelve people of varying career paths, and from several different local companies. So it was a good opportunity for us all to learn from each others different experiences and styles, and not feel biased to one particular corporate coaching style.

The course commenced in March where we received three days training, all classroom based. These three days were extremely intense and covered all areas of coaching. We started off by learning the very basics, what coaching is and is not, moving through each topic of core coaching skills, coaching models, limiting beliefs, peoples internal & external barriers, learning styles etc. It was incredibly thorough and interesting. We had a chance to reflect upon ourselves as well, identifying our own limiting beliefs and barriers, as this all plays an important part in becoming a good coach. We also coached each other on real issues, giving us the opportunity to get a feel for the whole coaching experience, what it's like to be coached, and how it feels coaching others. I was amazed as to how much of the classroom training I had actually absorbed, and these training coaching sessions went remarkably well. It was great to hear feedback from the others in the group on how the session went, both positive and constructive and gave me the chance to identify certain areas I need to improve on.

Once the classroom training was completed, we then attended a 3 day residential to the UK Sailing Academy on the Isle of Wight. This was a fantastic opportunity for us as a team of coaches to bond even closer. We were also introduced to the youths that we are coaching. The whole experience on the Isle of Wight was amazing and added so much value to the whole project. It allowed us to interact with the youths, and build a rapport with them and gain their trust. For me this is a key part of building a relationship with a



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coachee, and the environment at the UKSA was perfect to allow us to do this. Once the youths had 'worked us out', and it did take the afternoon of the first day to do this, they opened up to us. In fact the feeling I got was a sense of relief from them that there was no air of authority from us, and we were actually there to listen to them and work with them. At the end of the three days of water based activities, we had the opportunity to sit down one to one with our coachee's and chat about the coaching process and what's involved. It was extremely rewarding to see their commitment to the process, and the fact that they do actually want to make a difference to their futures.

The project continues now for the next twelve months, or until I complete my 30 hours of coaching. I have already had numerous coaching sessions with my youth, who is a 15yr old lad. Initially I found it incredibly challenging to sit down with someone of such a young age and work with them. I had to change my style of communication with him so that it was to his understanding and comfort. It is also important for me to remember to leave my 'baggage' outside the session so I am fully focussed to him. I also needed to forget that I am a father of three and try not to become the parent figure to him. I found this a struggle in the first session, and the parent in me felt like I needed to advise him rather than coach him. I am finding it easier now in further sessions to be able to hold back on the need to advise him, and really focus on the coaching aspect. It has been a fast learning curve for me in respect to developing the skill to adapt my communication style to suit different characters, and I still feel there is much more I can do to develop further.

My listening skills have also improved immensely and I am now listening to the language people are using and deciding on the best response I can offer so I can communicate with them effectively. We covered peoples learning styles during our training sessions, where we learn to identify if someone is Auditory, Kinaesthetic, or Visual. It's not something I have ever paid much attention to previously but just by identifying if someone prefers to work on a visual basis, by notes, diagrams etc, or as an auditory learner they prefer the spoken word, it makes two way communication flow easier. Also one point I have realised is that you do not have to be knowledgeable in the topic that the coachee brings to the session. As long as you can use appropriate questions, listen to the information being offered by the coachee, you can encourage and guide the coachee to open up and find the answers from within themselves.

So far this experience has been extremely enjoyable and the development I have noticed in myself is rewarding. As the project progresses and I continue with my coaching sessions I feel that at the end of this I will be an extremely confident, competent coach where hopefully I will bring these skills to the workplace and to my general life and coach naturally and not even have to wait for a booked session.

Well that's my goal anyway!



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