

# PREFACE

I am obsessed with work.

I realise in making this claim that I risk alienating those readers who have worked long and hard to bring a little balance into their own working lives and those of their colleagues, so let me qualify the statement.

I am not obsessed with *working*. I believe that for the most part people spend too many of their waking hours in factories, shops and offices and that many of these hours are not really productive. There is a difference between business and busyness. Throughout Europe and perhaps the UK in particular, this is further exacerbated by appending the start and end of each working day with as much as two hours travel in either direction. The promise of home working has also yet to materialise in my experience.

No, my obsession is with work itself. The way that places of work are organised and structured, the way that business is run and won, the increasing importance of work in people's lives and most crucially the business of deploying and developing staff.

This preoccupation started early for me. I left school at aged 16 with the four 'O' Levels I needed to secure my job with a high

street bank. Almost from the first day I was more interested in what was happening on the office side of the business than anything the customers might be getting up to. I was particularly puzzled by the way that one group of people apparently called *management*, would talk to another group of people apparently called *staff*. These interactions were usually terse, unfriendly affairs consisting of managers more or less ordering staff to do certain tasks which the staff then carried out to whatever minimum standard was necessary to get by. Looking back it all seemed quite adversarial with little sense of mutual success.

In my naivety I thought that people were people and that if you expected people to work hard and achieve results then you ought to treat them well; ‘Do unto others . . .’ and all that. This being the early 1980s however, high street banking was characterised by complacency, knowing that customers would continue to come and profits continue to flow however the business was run, and however its people were treated.

The de-regulation of the industry and the consequent increased competition in the 1990s changed all this. Now there was a need for staff to provide superior service lest the customers take their business elsewhere. People working in banks needed to become sales people and actively promote the bank’s products and services. Jobs which had been thought of as secure for a lifetime were now the subject of continual uncertainty.

The whole backdrop to the business changed irreversibly, but the management style did not. Those who struggled to make the change from bank clerk to sales person were told to shape up and get with the times. They were sent on sales training courses and if that didn’t work they were sent on them again. The pressure was on to perform; crude targets and incentives were introduced. Managers were hauled before directors and told to try harder, Staff were hauled before managers and told to try harder, or else.

Yours truly watched all this unfold with a sort of morbid fascination.

Of course banking as an industry was not alone in experiencing change of this kind or on this scale. Globalisation, the march of technology, downsizing and so on were all transforming the whole landscape of work and organisational life.

By now I was working in Personnel and had been introduced to the world of training and development. I'd had some exposure to management and team leader type roles and was seen to have an ability to get people on side and achieving results. As a management trainer I was similarly able to press the right buttons and to help people access their ability. I guess I was *coaching* them although I had no idea at the time that there even was such a thing, certainly not in the world of work.

In 1995 I was given the opportunity to attend a Performance Coaching course run by Sir John Whitmore and his firm Performance Consultants. As I learnt about coaching principles and practices I came to realise that coaching was simply a way of describing an approach to people at work that I had always believed in but had never been able to articulate. It offered an explanation as to why certain of my managers had been able to get the best from me and why others had left me exhausted and scanning the job advertisements. Coaching described a management style that I could see was essential for the turbulent times that were coming.

From that point forward coaching became the lynchpin of all my training and development work. I left banking and established my own consultancy practice where I found myself extolling the virtues of coaching and high performance even when I'd essentially been hired to teach Time Management or Presentation Skills. Eventually I decided to grasp the nettle and focus my practice on teaching managers how to coach.

Over the years we have taken coaching and applied it across the widest variety of organisations; public and private, small and large, in virtually every sector. All of this work has informed the ideas that I will present in this book.

This book is intended for anyone who must achieve results through others irrespective of age, gender, job-title, seniority, qualifications or experience. Indeed our training courses often attract people with no line management responsibility at all but whose work as business advisors or career counsellors for example suggests that coaching principles can apply to the external client as well as the internal team member.

That being said, I have written the book with the Human Resources (HR) Professional closest in mind as it seems that HR is often given the role of being both coach and implementer of coaching at the same time. This does not seem unreasonable and I think that HR is well-placed to act as champion of coaching. However, I hope that any of the increasing number of students of coaching be they formal or casual, will find a wealth of ideas here to help achieve coaching's ultimate goal:

To see people fulfil their potential.

Matt Somers  
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