

The Power of Coaching

Corporate coaching is a dynamic tool to accelerate leadership development at all levels. Extensively used across western organisations, the practice only started to be adopted in the Middle East recently as multinationals sourced coaches for their senior managements. Nic Woodthorpe-Wright, managing director of the UAE based WWA Corporate Coaching and former president of the International Coach Federation's Dubai Chapter, shares his insights on the executive coaching and the value it can deliver for regional firms.

Can you explain in a nutshell what does WWA Coaching do and with whom do you work?

As an organisation we currently have more than 30 certified executive coaches in the GCC region; most of whom have lived here for many years. We're aligned with the International Coach Federation (ICF), which is the largest governing body of coaching in the world with 27,000 members. We work across the region and are the preferred supplier for companies like HSBC, Siemens, and Intercontinental Hotels Group. They were among the first companies to recognize coaching as an important tool in their leadership development process. We also work with semi-government and private-sector organisations.



Nic Woodthorpe-Wright, Managing Director of WWA Corporate Coaching

Based on your experience, would you say that the concept of coaching has taken off in the region?

The Middle East is not completely different from the rest of the world, but there are some subtleties in the culture. A coach with that knowledge and awareness can provide more effective coaching. In the last four or five years, multinationals with experience in Europe and the U.S. have

been bringing their understanding of coaching into the region. The systems are now starting to absorb this and organisations are looking to integrate coaching into their HR development strategies.



Are there any cultural barriers preventing GCC companies from hiring coaches?

I've found Arab cultures to be very curious and intrigued by the coaching process. We work many GCC nationals; they make up about 50 percent of the people we work with and I think that number is going to climb. We also work in Saudi Arabia, the most

conservative culture in the region, and people are finding massive value in the coaching process.

Some coaches without experience are reportedly failing their clients. Why do you think this is happening?

First of all, coaching is not built on experience, it is built on process. A coach can work in industries they've never worked in before. For example, I may have never worked in the financial arena, but I can work with very senior people in the financial industry.

As a coach, I'm effective not because I bring in my technical expertise; in fact, you don't want my technical expertise, it will ruin your business. What I bring is an ability to work with you as a leader and to draw out your experience, knowledge and wisdom into the workspace, which you can then use more effectively. I don't do that with experience, I do that with coaching skills.

Experience is valuable in the GCC region for a different reason. We have a very hierarchal culture, one that respects authority and experience. But at the end of the day, organisations are realizing that if they continue to work with that hierarchy as it has been traditionally, they're going to have a challenge as the world starts to change. Coaching is a very powerful cultural shift that helps people access much more of the knowledge that sits within the organisation and to do that naturally with their processes.

Is coaching better suited for top management then?

Coaching is for every part of an organisation. When people are starting to step in to the coaching space, however, it's better that they sample it at the highest level possible, because they'll be sending the right message that coaching is not just for the junior levels. If seniors have got it, it becomes an aspirational process and a lot easier to sell internally.

Also, when the most senior people have already experienced coaching and talked about the outcomes positively, that's when coaching get the greatest value. Coaching works best when people feel excited and engaged. You put in 100% in, you get 100% out. You put 10% in, and you get the same out. You have to put in your own commitment into the process.

How would you advise an organisation that wants to hire a quality coach?

As an organisation, when you hire a coach you're taking a risk. And you want to minimize that risk. The best way to do that is to tick a number of boxes before you select a coach. Make sure your coach is certified in a recognized coaching model; there is a number of governing bodies out there, but the ICF is the largest and most prevalent in the GCC region. From an ICF point of view, find out their credentials, such as the number of hours that they've coached for. Then it's about chemistry, we're human beings so that's important.

- Heba Hashem