

Coaching at the heart of Leadership

Leadership can be extremely lonely and stressful, especially when an unanticipated crisis like Covid-19 disrupts convention, practice and wellbeing. Prof Sonia Blandford's second blog in our run-up to World Mental Health Day reflects on the power of a coaching relationship and the support it can offer in so many ways.



The notion that headteachers and their leadership teams can carry the pressure of working through the covid-19 pandemic without support is difficult to understand. The Chartered College of teaching has focused on leadership and teaching anxiety¹, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Teaching Profession² echoed these concerns.

There is a solution, developed in industry³ into education

Executive coaching is one of the fastest-growing professions worldwide for one reason. It works.

As a system for building leaders, inspiring teams and motivating growth, coaching shows tangible results across a wide array of industries and organisations.

Coaching works because it supports individuals and teams to build from their own strengths. In contrast to mentoring, which is based on the 'show me' principle, coaching has a sustainable, lasting impact. Early in my school leadership career I had the privilege of working with Dave Alred, the widely recognised and honoured England Rugby kicking coach. Dave's work with Jonny Wilkinson is legendary:

For Wilkinson, meeting Alred was a Eureka moment. He rated himself as a seven or eight out of ten goal kicker, but then he saw Alred hit a perfect spiral kick down the Bristol rugby training

¹ Chartered College of Teaching, TES September 2020

² APPG Teaching Profession, September 2020

³ <https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/the-growth-and-impact-of-the-coaching-industry/88852/>



field. "When I met Dave Alred, I thought I'm going to give this guy everything I've got," Wilkinson wrote in his eponymous autobiography Jonny. "Hold nothing back. If I'm going to get to where I want to go, I need him, and I need to drain every last bit of ability out of my being."⁴

Dave's approach to coaching is one that reflects the importance of understanding and developing self⁵ described by Peter Senge,

"Thank you for taking the time to talk with me yesterday - I feel I got so much out of it and am clear on the next steps in my leadership development after taking the time to reflect much more deeply"

Phase Leader, Birmingham

People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never 'arrive'. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident. Paradoxical? Only for these who do not see that the journey is the reward.

Over the last 10 years Achievement for All has delivered coach led programmes in over 6,000 schools and settings, each bespoke to the aspirations of the individuals and teams involved. The positivity from AfA partners is tangible, evidence based, as reflected in the many comments received on a weekly basis, the most recent include:

"Sometimes a listening ear and a safe space to bounce ideas around is what you need. Leading need not be in isolation"

"An outside eye can identify the nuances and the routes that would benefit from exploration. A team effort in moving forward"

"The coaching conversation has visible impact - supporting, challenging and providing space for leaders to lead"

Culminating in high impact:

Head Teacher, Birmingham

"Thanks, your feedback is really specific and constructive - gives us lots to move on with."

⁴ <http://en.espn.co.uk/england/rugby/story/226273.html>

⁵ https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Fifth_Discipline.html?id=bVZqAAAAMAAJ



Parent support worker, Northamptonshire

"We need every member of staff in every school using Emotion Coaching to support wellbeing and learning."

Phase Leader, Birmingham

"Thank you for taking the time to talk with me yesterday - I feel I got so much out of it and am clear on the next steps in my leadership development after taking the time to reflect much more deeply"

SENCO, Northamptonshire

"Working alongside our AfA coach engaging in professional dialogue and sharing and developing ideas has enhanced our provision and raised morale"

And, for our coaches, the rewards are varied and many:

"Being able to support colleagues by adding to school capacity, sharing tools and expertise and then seeing that impact is most rewarding"

"Educationalists love learning and embrace the wealth of materials we share with them adding to their settings offer"



Our Chair of Trustees, Dr Kulvarn Atwal, practicing what we preach as Headteacher of Highland Primary, Ilford

Click on the image or go to: <https://youtu.be/ZAURa-IGMuE>



As education settings journey through the trauma created by COVID-19, coaching for leaders is needed in all schools and settings. AfA emotion coaching trained coaches have a unique skill set to support well-being focused on improving education outcomes for all children. The most recent evidence of this impact is in Kensington Primary, winners of the Pearson National Teaching Award for Primary School of the Year, as described by their headteacher

*“We started on our journey to teach not manage behaviour 3 years ago. Our partnership with the AfA and, particularly, our allocated coach Laura has helped us to hugely accelerate the process and turn a vision into reality. Our approach to ‘Relationships and Regulation’ is a fundamental part of our children’s successful return. **Despite all of the challenges, they have started this academic year happier, more focused, and more enthused by their learning than ever before. That is in no small part due to our approach and the symbiotic relationship with AfA.**”*

Now is the time to engage with the amazing AfA coaching team. If you or a school within your community would like to engage further with a member of our experienced coaches, either online or face to face, we would love to hear from you.

Drop us a line at: support@afaeducation.org / Or call for a chat: 01635 279 499

Visit afaeducation.org to learn more about our leadership development and professional training approaches that have reached nearly six thousand education settings over nearly a decade.

