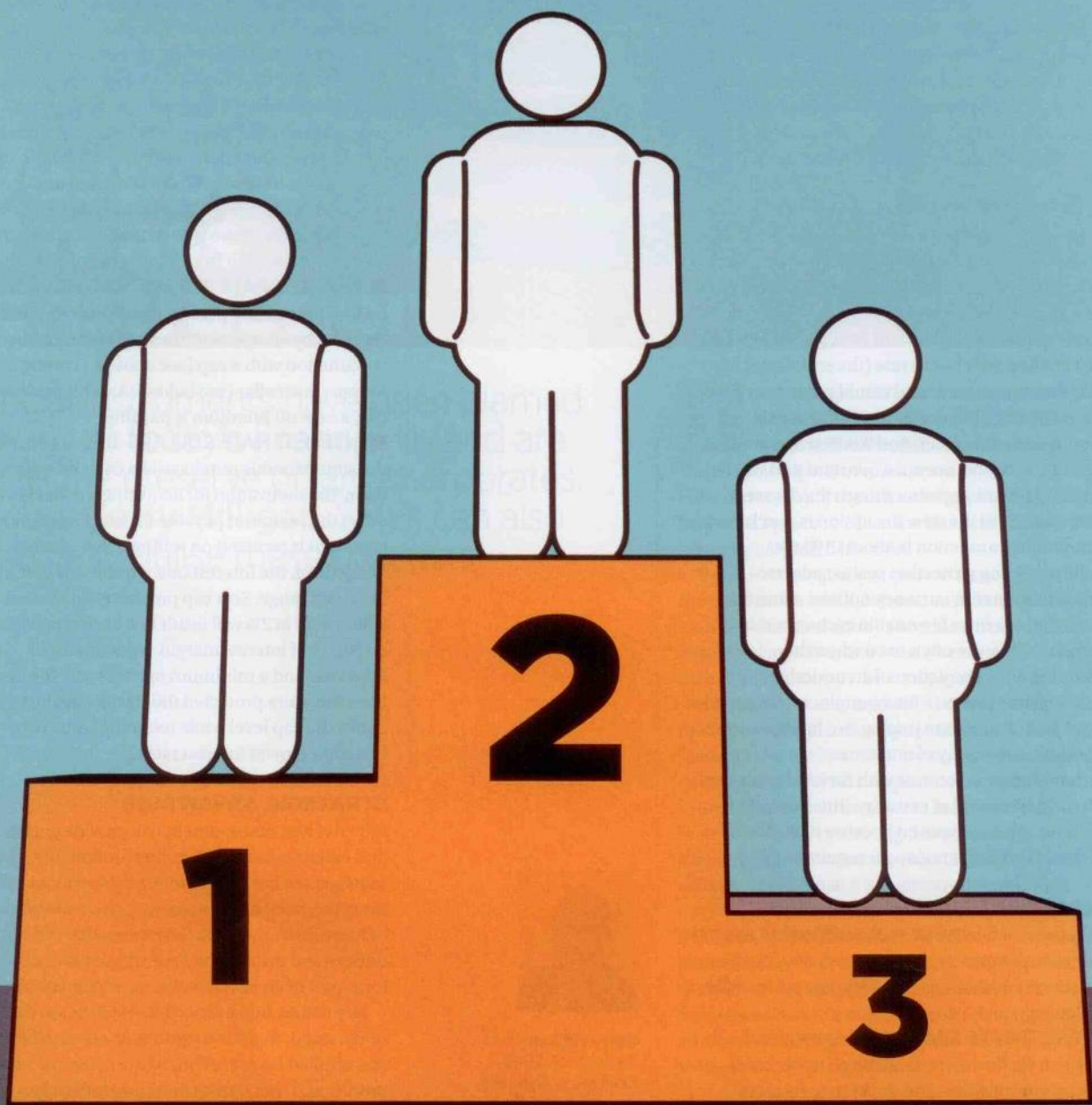


Coaching to the power of two

A new form of business coaching, in which two colleagues are coached simultaneously, helps to improve communication at work and increase productivity. **Val Sampson** explains



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Business coaching is a solution many organisations have turned to when trying to improve the way staff work and the effectiveness of the business. Traditionally, the focus has been on one-to-one sessions, with a coach dealing with a client. But now dual coaching is emerging as a productive and cost-effective alternative.

Dual coaching brings two people who work together into a joint coaching session. The aim is to create a more dynamic and successful business relationship. The process provides greater clarity and a shared, solid understanding of direction and priorities. Ideally, staff will leave the session with greater awareness and knowledge of how to implement new behaviour and actions to better serve the business – and each other.

The one-to-one coaching model means a client can only act on insights gained once they have left the session. With dual coaching, the creative problem solving starts immediately, which means the session starts to become effective almost immediately.

The approach was first used in the NHS to enable health trust leaders to resolve difficulties that remained unaired at board level. Its benefits included creating more effective working relationships faster.

Since then dual coaching has been used with joint business partners, project leaders from different departments and senior managers who job share. Research indicates that it works well with line managers and direct reports as well as staff at a similar level in their organisation. Each dual coaching situation is, of course, unique depending on the issues involved. Yet common challenges arise. The following situations illustrate where the approach has worked well.

INFLUENCING UPWARDS

Two senior job-sharing managers wanted to discuss their occasionally unsatisfactory relationship with their line manager, who regularly cancelled meetings at the last minute. The coach drew attention to the fact that the communication between the two job-sharers also seemed erratic, citing agenda clashes as an example. Their schedule mix-up sent a negative message to colleagues, suggesting neither knew what the other was doing. Both colleagues acknowledged that their lack of communication was not only harming their reputations but also making their working lives unnecessarily challenging.

After discussing their current working practices, the colleagues established new ways of communicating more regularly, including inviting their comms specialist to join them in their weekly meeting.

They also devised a joint approach to the difficulties they faced with their manager, including creating a flexible agenda and a PowerPoint schedule, so they

TOP TIPS FOR DUAL COACHING

PREPARATION

From the outset, clients should be prepared to divulge as much information as possible about their individual roles and their working relationship.

ACCEPTANCE

Both clients should be equally committed to the success of the dual coaching process.

INVOLVEMENT

Each client should be prepared to do an equal amount of work during the session and towards achieving agreed goals.

RE-EVALUATION

Both clients should be prepared to re-evaluate the ideas and beliefs they may hold about their colleague.

NEXT STEPS

Both clients should leave the meeting with a clear idea of their next steps in order to achieve goals jointly agreed during the session.

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could focus her attention virtually if face-to-face meetings were cancelled. The coaching not only reinvigorated a belief in their ability to job-share effectively, they finished the process with tangible strategies for developing their working relationship, including the ability to coach each other in the future.

TAKING ON CHALLENGES

A chairperson and CEO began to work together after their hospital applied for foundation trust status. It became apparent in a dual coaching session that a significant member of their board was not performing as he should, and the coach raised this. By articulating what had previously been a silent dilemma for both colleagues, the coach created a powerful shift in the relationship, paving the way for the chairperson and CEO to create a solution. The board member was replaced. At the end of the coaching sessions, the chairperson and CEO reported that they had successfully and quickly created an effective working relationship.

MANAGING A TRICKY COLLEAGUE

Two partners in a successful fashion business were concerned by the imminent return of the senior, third partner after maternity leave. In her absence they had created a more open atmosphere in the office, increased profits and built new relationships with clients. In their view, they had changed the company from her kingdom to a democracy, and they were uncertain how to present this to her. By introducing a planning and thinking approach, the coach helped them to devise ways of physically changing the office environment to support equal communication. And they also decided that in future they would all take it in turns to chair meetings. Challenged by the coach on how they would avoid potential sabotage by the third partner, they agreed a new way to present their strategies which involved explaining the financial benefits and requesting input from the previously absent partner.

In one coaching session they moved from feeling they were at a two out of 10 in terms of achieving their goals for the return of the third partner, to an eight out of 10. The coaching provided a renewed sense of confidence that they could make changes in their business to the benefit of all three partners. ■



Val Sampson of Two Rivers Coaching developed the dual coaching model tworiverscoaching.co.uk