

Movers and shakers

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The Daily Telegraph appointments

The very model of a modern major coach

Fiona Eldridge looks at an executive coaching model that is said to return its outlay tenfold to the grateful client

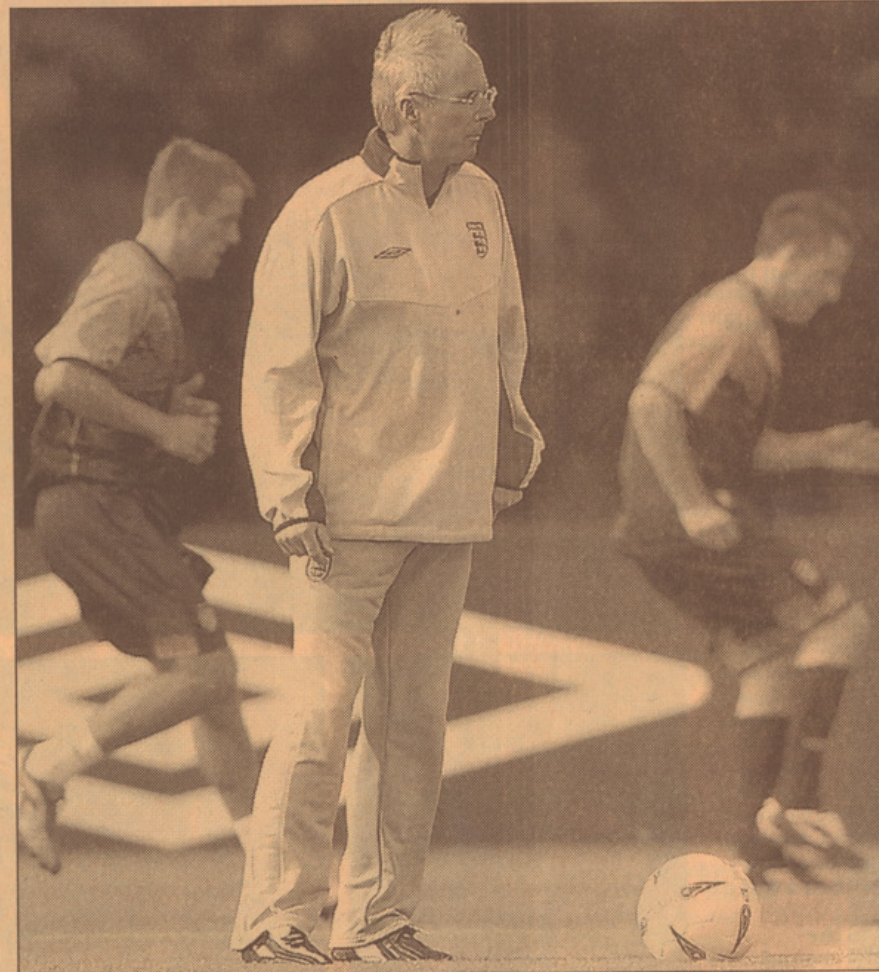
IT'S Monday morning again and you're sitting comfortably, surrounded by all that is familiar in your office. The coffee is brewing, people are bustling round greeting each other after the weekend and settling down to work. You're doing OK – so how come there's that little voice, that niggling feeling, that photo in the paper making you think that you want something else?

But, what and how and when? Increasing numbers of people are turning to coaches to help them achieve their goals. But what do coaches actually do? Along with Sabine Dembkowski, director of The Coaching Centre, I conducted an international best practice study of executive coaches in the US, England and Germany.

The study has led to the development of a new coaching model – the Achieve Coaching Model. This model is now helping coach clients to improve their performance and reach their objectives and has been demonstrated to achieve an above average return on the coaching investment for clients.

What lies behind the success of the new model? I believe transparency increases trust. Uncovering what the best coaches do and sharing this with others can help to improve coaching practice and help buyers and users of executive coaching services to assess what is on offer. In the, US studies have shown that clients who use well-trained coaches receive a return on their investment of between 600pc and 1,000pc. We conducted our study by observing excellent coaches in action, and supplemented observations with interviews guided by the seemingly simple question: "What do great coaches do to achieve outstanding results?"

Distilling the results of the study reveals that there appear to be five essential



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Role model: Sven Goran Eriksson, the England coach, is known for his subtle, understated approach. The skilful executive coach does not bully, but establishes a close rapport

coaching skills: development of rapport, deep listening, creative and open questioning, open and honest feedback and use of intuition. But the whole process stretches over seven stages.

1. Assess the current situation. The coach establishes rapport and begins the dialogue using open questions. Clients become aware of their situation and often start to recognise behavioural patterns that hinder success.

2. Creative brainstorming of alternatives to the current situation. How often have you experienced that feeling of being stuck with no apparent options to escape a situation? All too often this leads to increased stress. The secret here is for the coach to ask an unexpected question.

3. Hone goals. We've all experienced goal-setting of some sort and try to be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) about it. However, for a goal to be really useful it needs to be meaningful to the individual. The best coaches devote significant time to working with clients to refine their goals.

4. Initiate options. Novice coaches are inclined to rush through this stage of the process and at times give advice. How much easier to tell someone. But great coaches take time, ask open questions and let the client generate new options for action and behaviour. It is only when the options come from the client that real commitment can be generated for action and change. Perhaps one of the greatest skills of a coach is to know when to keep silent and wait.

5. Evaluate options. In this step the coach works with the client to develop a set of criteria to evaluate the different options. For example, what investment (money, time, energy) is needed to put a specific option into practice? It often helps to provide a visual stimulus by writing things down.

6. Valid action programme design. It's like building a bridge. The best coaches we saw work together with their clients to bridge the gap of where they are and where they want to be. This step requires rigour from the coach to gain the client's commitment to action. It's all very well planning, but nothing will happen unless the client takes the first step. As with any journey, it is also important to know when you've arrived. So, time is spent working with the client to recognise when they achieve their goal.

7. Encourage momentum. The good coach

One of the greatest skills of a coach is to know when to keep silent

is also a "professional nag". Clients continue to require motivation and to keep them on track email and phone calls can provide the necessary prompts.

There are many claims for the benefits of coaching.

Certainly, successful coaching empowers and motivates people to develop skills and knowledge, solve problems and make decisions and thus, fulfil their potential. This new model helps both coaches and potential users of their services to achieve outstanding results.

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