



As the credit crunch bites, coaches must get ready to help their clients survive the crisis

TROUBLE IS OUR BUSINESS

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As coaches, now is the time to make our greatest contribution. Organisations are under intense pressure to restructure and focus on core money-making activities. Inevitably this leads to budget cuts, restructuring or redundancies. CEOs and leaders need to make tough judgment calls; if the changes are too small, more will be needed later. If the changes are too severe, opportunities may be missed when the economy recovers.

Coaching helps leaders to think clearly, prepare for the most difficult conversations and presentations, stay focused, alert and centred. And it has never mattered more than right now.

What should coaches do to survive and thrive – and hence sustain clients and organisations?

● **Put your own oxygen mask on first** If you don't have a coach, get one now. If there's no

budget, co-coach with a friend, or approach the training schools – Meyler Campbell has a "Practice Client" scheme.

● **Goals, goals, goals**

The time for sloppy coaching has gone. If you're managing coaching in-house, be clear about why it's being done. Make sure you can document the business case in ruthlessly

pragmatic terms. If you're coaching, help your clients to identify – and reach – clear goals.

● **Re-read the "In the Grip" guidelines for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator** They contain

clear descriptions on where each personality type goes when faced with chronic or acute stress – and practical advice on how to get them out of it.

● **Redouble your focus on strengths** The research is clear. If, as Carol Kauffman, founder of the Coaching and Positive Psychology Initiative, says, we "reverse the focus" away from our Darwinian hard-wired negativity towards accurate balanced thinking, the performance rewards are significant. Chapter 5 of Alex Linley's book *Average to A+* (CAPP Press, 2008) is an excellent,

practical survey of the tools available, including many that are simple to use and free.

● **Think about your strategy for the two possible types of recession** It could be U-shaped – a long slow grind along the bottom – or V-shaped – a sharp recovery as rapid as the dive down has been. It takes bravery, but thinking through the implications of each, for you and your business, could pay dividends. Shell arguably survived the 1970s oil shock better than the others because it had done deep scenario planning, and was more psychologically prepared for everything – even the unthinkable.

As recession looms, senior leaders hang on to their coaches like grim death. Those who formerly might have considered "hiding out" for a couple of years doing an MBA in

preparation for the upturn are now doing serious coach training instead.

Why does coaching boom in difficult economic times? Apart from "looking after number one", there are two main reasons. First, high levels of anxiety and uncertainty are inevitable. Unchecked, they become particularly corroding and

destructive. Coaching is the only place where people are required to think calmly, thus generating and evaluating more creative options, and better decisions.

Second, the "stayers" in the organisation are likely to be under more pressure. Coaching can support them to remain focused, reprioritise and maintain motivation to stay productive.

For those who are made redundant, coaching provides an effective alternative to task-focused outplacement services that traditionally target as quick a return to the workforce as possible.

Coaching conversely challenges and supports people to look more deeply and widely. ■

● See also *How to*, page 54

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