

In our new column giving a female perspective on L&D, Anna Phillips asks "who needs coaching accreditation?"

Coaching accreditation is growing explosively; why? Who needs accrediting bodies?!

Well, both sides: buyers and suppliers.

First, 'suppliers', or the coaches themselves. Business coaching has been around, and respected, for more than 25 years in the UK and is entering a stage of maturity. Proper training, supervision, continuing professional development (CPD) are all very much the norm and accreditation is just part of this natural stage of development of the profession.

Coaches tend to be people who care a great deal about their work, and want to link up with a body or bodies that will provide validation of their practice and scope for constant upgrading through new learning.

The buyers' needs are different. If the coaches are in it for validation and development, buyers' needs can be more simple – survival!

Buying coaching for a cadre of senior players may not be the most important decision of the year but will certainly be one of the most exposed, as they will have direct and personal experience of your choice and will definitely form a view – whether positive or negative!

So, particularly for less experienced buyers who haven't yet got together an iron-clad "little black book" of top coaches they know and trust, accreditation gives a feeling of safety.

But there's a problem. First, let's get clear on the difference between certification and accreditation. The first refers to the certificate you get from the training provider you went to. Our research early this year (report available from info@meylercampbell.com) showed there are 47 of these, doubtless of widely varying quality. This is where accreditation comes in: only a few training courses in the UK have gone on to the second stage, and got accreditation, where a rigorous external assessor puts the training

provider through a tough examination and, if they pass, accredits them. So it's the next level up in the quality stakes.

But which accreditation? AC, Apecs, BPS/SGCP, EMCC, ENTO, ICF, ILM, or WABC: which is right for you? Well, it depends on what you're looking to achieve – it's 'horses for courses'.

For us, in our particular sector (senior business people – 63 per cent of our graduates are CEOs or senior HR/L&D directors) there is, surprisingly, a simple answer: the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC). Because our graduates work all over the world, true global coverage is essential and, as the name indicates, its exclusive focus on business coaching makes it the one for us.

After two years' hard work we were very pleased in July this year to be the first training course in Europe to be awarded that valuable 'badge'.

So what of the future?

One trend we notice is that, faced with the proliferation of accrediting bodies, some large corporates are taking matters into their own hands. For example, when Sam Humphrey (now one of our Meyler Campbell Faculty) was global head of coaching at Unilever, she pioneered a series of processes, including formal assessment centres in four locations around the world, to ensure all coaching worldwide was appropriate for Unilever's strategic needs in each sector.

Many firms are now following her lead and seeking to develop robust internal quality systems for their coaching – sometimes in partnership with an accrediting body, sometimes going it alone.

In terms of the many accrediting bodies coming together, good work is being done but it won't happen overnight. The fact that more than 120 UK and international organisations from the coaching world came together at the Global Coaching Convention (GCC) in Dublin this summer was a wonderful demonstration of willingness but, if the experience of related professions in business and other fields is anything to go by, we won't see unified accreditation soon: medicine has managed it, but they've been formally constituted for 250 years; psychology has had more than a century and it is still work in progress! But at least we're moving in the right direction. ■



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