

Assess your role and what you achieve.

Who do you talk to?

You have many things to deal with on a day to day basis, plus trying to do the long-term thinking needed to provide leadership and run your part of the business. You probably find yourself being very busy, possibly working long hours and, if you are honest, being reactive most of the time. When do you get (or make!) time to really think about the organisation, or the way you are operating personally? (Working **on** the business rather than **in** it!)

When you are a leader in a business you face a number of challenges at different levels. Ask yourself how much focus you put on to these:

Strategic issues

- Assessing your role and what you achieve;
- Who are your main competitors and what are they doing to improve productivity?
- Medium and long-range goals and aims – and planning?
- What direction do you want to go in, why and how? Implications?

Tactical issues

- Day to day challenges;
- Financial aspects, especially budgets;

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- Monitoring and control;
- Sales and service.

People issues

- Staff – numbers, performance, motivation, development;
- Customers and suppliers;
- Colleagues and working relations.

Many in your position are so busy dealing with the running of the operation, they rarely take time to think about these things in a more

“Someone who can listen in a slightly more detached way.”

detached way. This is often compounded by a sense of isolation, brought about by their position too. Is this familiar? Who do you talk to about your own style of running what you do, or handling your people? Who can you share concerns with, without feeling you are weakening your position?

This inability to spend time, or the right amount of time, on these vital

areas carries risks. What do you do about your own challenges and concerns? Not many set out to fail in their business lives, so why do they? Disasters can be prevented with the right degree of warning, or the right type of support. Many people running part of an organisation are too close to it. They do not have time to work out what they are doing well and to arrange to do more of these things. When things may not be going the right way, they do not consider things objectively. The pressures build and it seems even harder to share concerns with a third party. This can lead to a downward spiral towards who knows where!

If things are going awry, another area to suffer may be your family or friends. If you are using them as your sounding board, or just carrying bad news or discussing concerns with them, it may not help those relationships. However, nor does hiding these things from them either!

So what can you do if you feel you do want someone to talk to?

Advisors

This might be a person you know with a specific 'technical'

competence who you can turn to. Think about them as someone you can present your situation to and ask for their ideas, or suggestions, about what you could, or should, do. They can be very useful when you need particular expertise.

Network

Depending on how you operate, you will probably have some sort of network of contacts, whether part of a formal set-up or not. Think about whom you know, who has what qualities or skills you respect or admire and then approach them. (If you are in an organisation, consider colleagues or superiors.)

Mentors

A mentor is somewhat different to a coach, though we could go into a long debate about where the differences lie. Typically, a mentor is someone who has relevant experience and expertise to share with you, though they do not necessarily give specific advice. Many of us use mentors at times in our lives, often without knowing it. We find the person we respect and start to talk to them! A number of large organisations have set up formal mentoring schemes and you may have experienced this. There are many mentoring options available through professional bodies or on a local level, although many of these are focussed on helping you to achieve professional qualifications or maintaining CPD

criteria. If you want to look for a mentor, you might want to approach your networks and even family and ask for their ideas or recommendations.

You want somebody who will be a good listener to act as a sounding board, who can then share ideas from their own experiences about what pitfalls to consider and what options you may want to pursue. The mentoring relationship can be formal, informal or a combination – with a frequency to suit you.

“Experience and expertise to share with you.”

Coaches

This can be an emotive subject these days! The world seems to be filled with ‘executive’ and ‘life’ coaches. Fundamentally, executive coaches will work with you on business and career issues and life coaches work with you on what **you** want, which may span both work and home. However, the boundaries are often more blurred than that and good executive coaches (who probably have more business experience than many life coaches) will frequently work with you on both aspects.

Coaches will work differently to

mentors in that they rarely offer advice. A good coach will support and challenge you on your issues and help you to focus on what you want to achieve. When that is defined, they will help you to develop action plans and support you through these, whether by phone, email or face-to-face sessions. To get good value from a coach, decide what you want to achieve and have some idea of the timescale for this. Although the relationship can go beyond this, consider the coach as someone to help you achieve specific aims and who will keep you moving forward – as many sports people, musicians and actors do.

Having a coach may seem something of a luxury or self-indulgence. However, what is the cost of things going wrong, or not working the way you want? Coaching could be one of the best investments you make.

Lastly, you always have the option of doing nothing! However, there are risks as we have said and these can creep up on you. You do not have to formally get a mentor or coach, but just talking things over with friends at the gym or the golf club might not help too much. Your family and friends may seem very encouraging. Is that what you need? Sometimes, it is someone who can listen in a slightly more detached way, question and challenge you whilst wanting you to succeed in your career. So it might be worth finding someone to talk to. After all, no man or woman is an island!

You probably find yourself being very busy.



Graham Yemm is a founding partner of Solutions 4 Training Ltd. www.solutions4training.com His personal enjoyment comes from helping individuals to take more responsibility for their own actions, freeing them to feel they can make more choices about their lives. He summarises this as helping people to make breakthroughs and be more aligned within themselves – whilst keeping a business focus!