

Case Study: Kent County Council



Kent County Council is one of the largest councils in England, providing more than 300 services for around 1.6 million residents. The council is responsible for overseeing twelve district councils and for managing public services such as education, transport, strategic planning and public safety.

COACHING IN KENT

In 2005 Kent County Council decided that they would like to develop a coaching culture. Like many other organisations the council realised that coaching has the potential to create a less directive leadership style, as well as offering a good level of workplace support to employees. Kent County Council decided to join up with public sector organisations in their area to create a very unique partnership approach to coaching.

Their first step was to open up access to the coaching and mentoring qualification to other public sector organisations which resulted in a partnership with Kent Fire & Rescue and 14 other organisations joining the network. These range from The Prison Service to the NHS. Each delegate paid a stipend towards the training, but afterwards got to access Kent's Coaching and Mentoring Network for free. Membership to the network gave coaches a range of CPD perks including Association of Coaching membership, group supervision, co-coaching, two annual coaching conferences, a code of ethics, and access to the latest coaching research articles.

In return for relatively little investment, the Kent region now has a huge pool of 180 trained coaches. Employees have an ample choice of coaches to choose from, and the size of the coaching pool allows for great networking and professional development opportunities. Support for the programme has been high, with anecdotal glowing feedback from numerous managers.

THE CHALLENGE

Having successfully built up such a large and well-trained coaching pool, Kent County Council hit upon a new problem; that of administration. It fell to the Kent Learning and Development team within the council to arrange for coach matching. As is often the case, this task was taken on in addition to everyday job responsibilities. As the coaching pool grew, so too did the spiral of juggling spreadsheets and coaching requests. It soon became all but impossible to keep track of all the coaching happening across the pool, let alone to arrange for any formal evaluation.

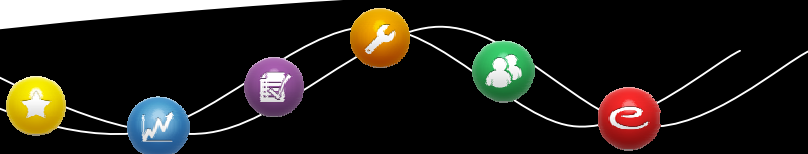
With the government cuts, demand for coaching only grew. As with many other public sector organisations Kent County Council faced inevitable lay-offs, with 1500 staff due to lose their jobs. They began to offer coaching as part of a redeployment programme and many of those facing unemployment took up the opportunity to talk through their career options in a safe environment. Overwhelmed by work and loathe to employ a costly administrator, the Kent Learning and Development team began to wonder: was there a more cost effective way to manage their coaching pool?

THE VIRTUAL SOLUTION

The task of finding an online coaching management system fell to Coral Ingleton, Learning and Development Manager at Kent County Council. She looked at a few different systems and decided to use **mye-coach**. Her primary criteria was finding a system that would be technically simple and would make it possible for her to create evaluation reports about coaching activity. She was delighted that **mye-coach** also made it possible for her to upload a range of coaching documents that could then be shared across the Kent Coaching and Mentoring Network.

"Coaching Focus are so helpful, nothing is too much trouble. If you have any problems you can go back to them. They've been extremely supportive. It's been a very good working partnership."

Coral Ingleton, Learning and Development
Manager, Kent County Council



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UP AND RUNNING

Kent County Council found it easy to set up the online coaching system. The technical requirements were few, and getting the system up and running was a quick process. Coral Ingleton particularly enjoyed working with the **mye-coach** team; the team were very helpful in tailoring aspects of the online system to meet Kent County Council's specific requirements.

THE SYSTEM IN PRACTICE

In the end, the most challenging aspect of using **mye-coach** was not the technical requirements but the people factor. Having established a pool of 180 coaches with time-honored working patterns, it was difficult for Kent County Council to retrospectively convince their coaches to register with the new virtual system.

Coaching Focus talked through the issues with Kent County Council and suggested that they include the task of registering with **mye-coach** as part of their coach training. This solved the problem for new coaches. For the more established coaches the challenge was overcome with gentle nudging and – ultimately – a deadline by which coaches who were not registered on the system would no longer be matched with new clients.

Other than that, the system worked magnificently. For Coral Ingleton, a coach as well as a learning and development professional, **mye-coach** was of great use in her own coaching practice as well as from an HR perspective. She found the note-keeping system made it easy to share goals and actions with her coachees, and the online reminders were a useful prompt to keep coaching sessions on track. Best of all was the toolkit that allowed her to access hundreds of up-to-the-minute coaching tools on a wide range of topics. For example, when one of her coachees was struggling with self-confidence she was able to go onto the system and find a dozen techniques for helping him meet that challenge. She could then go into her next coaching session fully prepared.

RESULTS

From Kent County Council's perspective the best thing about using an online coaching system will be the opportunity to manage and evaluate coaching. For the first time they can press a button and get an up-to-the-minute overview of all coaching programmes. Soon, all their coaches will be online and the system will automatically match coaches to coachees as well.

For Coral Ingleton this is the result she wanted. Coaching will no longer be reliant upon her small team juggling spreadsheets and retaining reams of information in their heads. Instead the management is professional. Coral now has more free time to think about coaching strategy, develop her innovative partnership model, and use **mye-coach's** evaluation capacity to prove the positive effect that coaching is having on the council's service provision.

"You need to evaluate coaching to be able to prove its effectiveness. You know, we can tell you how wonderful coaching is and get people to stand up and do case studies. But at the end of the day you've got to have the information. You've got to know the numbers. Using an online coaching system is efficient, it's professional, and if you're serious about coaching then it should be an essential part of your coaching strategy."

Coral Ingleton, Learning and Development
Manager, Kent County Council

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