

Companies are turning to long-distance coaches

Unlocking business potential, one phone call at a time

By
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BABYLON – For 13 weeks Siobhan Murphy talked intensely with branch managers at State Bank of Long Island on how to grow their business. But she did it almost exclusively by phone. She only met them once.

Call it virtual coaching or tele-coaching, but it's being done more and more nowadays by professionals such as Murphy, president of Quest Coaching International. Coaching is essentially working with employees to unlock their potential, probing everything from sales to management.

"The great thing about coaching skills is they work at all levels of the organization," says Murphy, and executives like to use it to develop employees and retain talent.

While sales people are prime candidates for coaching, Murphy has helped consultants, chiropractors, educators, professors and managers who wanted to improve their productivity.

The process of coaching, she said, is different from traditional training, which is focused on teaching a specific skill.

"A coach approach is a kind of conversation you have that assumes the person in front of you is bright and has their own answers and you engage in the process of discovery with them," Murphy explains.

Today's coaches often hold such classes over the phone.

Murphy has taught managers from all over the world. She followed a single on-site session in Ireland, for instance, with telephone classes conducted from the United States.

"The number-one benefit for the client is convenience," says the Babylon-based executive. "There's no travel involved. They can call me from wherever they are, which doesn't necessarily

mean their desk. They save travel time."

While there may be benefits in face-to-face contact, coaching over the phone can be easier for companies with many offices or people on the road.

"There's a trade-off in terms of time and cost," says Murphy. "If people have to come for the follow-up to one location, it would be much more costly, just in driving time."

Using the conference call has its benefits: Class begins immediately, no ritual of coffee and greetings and drawn-out good-byes.

It's really caught on. The International Coach Federation, a not-for-profit professional association of personal and business coaches, now has grown to about 9,000 members worldwide. It's used for everything from how to start your own business or sell your own product to how to audition and how to get published.

"Teleclasses and coaching on the phone are a way to bring people together from around the United States," insists Dixi Lee, director of operations for Phonebrain.com, a Los Angeles-based firm that provides teleconferencing and recording services. "We even have clients from France, Switzerland and Australia who call in."

Most of her sessions last from six to 12 weeks with classes of five to 50 people.

It's helped by "bridge" technology which now allows people to patch into these conference calls at a nominal fee or no-fee through Web sites such as Mrconference.com, which is run by Phonebrain.com.

Lee said her company uses that free tele-conferencing service to attract clients who later may want to pay for services like moderators.

Coaches also can pay for the option to put people on mute, screen out background noise, and with a touch of a button turn the session into a dialogue. On top of that, the entire class can be recorded and the sessions accessed easily.

"I can conduct a call and record it so people can dial in and hear later," said Murphy, who has conducted sessions for up to 100 people.

There are personal touches too. Although the person "in front of you" may be thousands of miles away and talking to lots of people, it's still a one-on-one experience for you since you're alone on the phone. ■



Murphy: The phone works fine

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