

Business & Finance



NatWest

Contact our business and finance team. For editorial email david.castle@kosmedia.co.uk or to talk about advertising within section telephone: 01303 817040.

Get ahead, get a coach

By **DAVID CASTLE**

david.castle@kosmedia.co.uk

LIFE coaching is growing in popularity in the business community. Large blue chip firms such as Shell, BP and Unilever are increasingly recognising the cost and risks of stress to their senior executives. Many are turning to coaches to help staff deal with work/life balance issues.

But, in what is a burgeoning industry, how do you guarantee your life coach is up to the job? Dealing with complex business issues, prioritising work commitments and handling complicated personal situations is not easy at the best of times: getting a qualified life coach who can handle them all is another matter.

The European Coaching Institute has launched a new vetting service designed to ensure business people who use the services of life coaches have access to a database providing information on whether the coaches they intend using are qualified.

With many business owners, especially those in smaller firms, employing the services of a coach as much as a day a month, ensuring your coach is qualified to deal with specific business and personal needs is becoming increasingly important.

It's certainly something Maxine Harrison, owner of Tenterden-based Elysian Holidays discovered when she employed Barbara Dalpra, qualified master coach with The Nyasa Partnership Limited and deputy CEO of the



MENTORING: An increasing number of business people are turning to life coaches

European Coaching Institute, to help her with a number of challenges her business was facing.

Elysian Holidays is a worldwide villa accommodation specialist holiday company, renting villas on the Greek Islands, Spain, Mallorca, Menorca, Portugal, Italy, Cyprus, France, Morocco, Costa Rica and other locations.

Although the business was doing well, it faced a challenges triggered by events like the impact of 9/11, where people simply decided not to travel as far, and the exchange rate fluctuations of both the euro and the US dollar.

"I met Barbara at a local networking function

hosted by Business Link Kent," explains Maxine. "I wasn't look for a coach of any kind, but I was extremely interested in what she had to say. The reason I realised it was something I could benefit from was I was having problems prioritising and organising my business and personal life – both of which are hectic."

The initial coaching sessions were scheduled to provide Maxine with the opportunity to clearly define the business goals, her goals within the business and her own personal goals. "I felt I was not being nearly as productive as I knew I could be," she says.

Once the goals were clearly defined, Maxine, with Barbara's support, started to work towards achieving them. Each was broken down into manageable chunks. During the coaching sessions, these smaller goals were addressed and a number of steps discussed and actions agreed.

"She made me realise it was actually possible to do everything, as I'd reached a point where I thought I simply couldn't do it all," says Maxine. "By laying it all out in front of me, and working out a structured plan, it gave me the confidence to be able to deal with all the issues and be productive."

With these short-term goals achieved, Maxine has also recently developed a further growth plan, which includes an element of diversification and taken the first steps towards achieving these new goals.

Having used a coach successfully to identify new areas for her business, she is convinced of the benefits. But, she warns, not everyone who calls himself or herself a life coach has the skills to do the job properly. Although she had a personal introduction to Barbara, she can see the benefits of having a database of qualified coaches who can be matched to your specific business requirements.

"Accreditation is extremely important," she explains. "Anyone can do life coaching, but not everyone can do it properly. It requires a particular type of person, who can be a counsellor, business minded, with excellent intuition. Above all, you need to be someone who has adequate life experience. Guaranteeing these credentials is vital."

For more details on life coaching, see www.europeancoachinginstitute.org.