



Coaching at the UN Secretariat: The Missing Puzzle Piece

For organizations that place a premium on training and leadership development, coaching can yield the missing puzzle piece by supporting individuals' growth and reinforcing classroom learning. Recent industry research conducted by the International Coach Federation (ICF) shows that a growing number of organizations are utilizing coaching to achieve their talent-development goals. In July 2013, the ICF released findings from its *Organizational Coaching Study*, which was undertaken to provide businesses, coaches, stakeholders and the general public with new information and insights about the status, value, effectiveness and impact of professional coaching. **The study reinforced what prior ICF studies have shown: that, for organizations of all sizes and in all sectors, coaching works.**

Training and leadership development have long been institutional priorities for the UN Secretariat, with managers enrolling in the organization's Management Development Program (MDP). In 2009, the UN Secretariat initiated a review and revision of the MDP, contracting the consulting firm EnCompass LLC to oversee implementation. According to Maria Hutchinson, Chief of the Learning, Leadership and Organizational Development Section, Office of Human Resources Management, for the UN Secretariat, "As we reviewed feedback from previous MDP participants, several people indicated that they felt coaching would assist them in applying the new management approaches we were teaching [in the

classroom]." As a result, EnCompass positioned coaching at the center of the reconceived MDP.

When a manager enrolls in the MDP, he or she participates in a 360-degree feedback assessment and uses the results to develop a personalized list of goals, as well as an action plan for achieving them. Bookending the MDP are two intensive, residential workshops totaling six days in length. During the months between the two workshops, MDP participants commit to a four-hour engagement with a professional coach. According to Jeri Darling, president, Darling Global, LLC, and former vice president of leadership and organizational

effectiveness for EnCompass, coaching has increased the training program's efficacy by providing participants the opportunity to put classroom learning into practice and to set and pursue professional and personal development goals in a structured setting.



PHOTO: UN Secretariat and EnCompass LLC representatives at ICF Global 2012.

Since the relaunch of the MDP, more than 1,300 UN Secretariat employees have received coaching. The organization reports an 87.6 percent return on its investment in coaching—a \$1.88 return for every dollar spent. In 2012, the UN Secretariat was awarded an International Prism Award by the ICF. The Prism Award honors organizations that have achieved a standard of excellence in the implementation of coaching programs for culture change, leadership development, productivity and performance improvement.

Feedback from MDP participants and coaches shows that the 360-degree assessment process, classroom training sessions and coaching are impacting individual and organizational performance at the UN Secretariat. Hutchinson says the MDP has made employees more aware of their own capacity for productivity. MDP participants have also experienced improved self-confidence, interpersonal skills, communication skills, team effectiveness, work/life balance and time management. These improvements are consistent with ICF findings on the benefits of coaching. In the *2009 ICF Global Coaching Client Study*,

80 percent of coaching clients reported improved self-confidence. In the same study, clients reported improved interpersonal relationships (73 percent), communication skills (72 percent), team effectiveness (51 percent), work/life balance (67 percent) and time management (57 percent).

According to Hutchinson, the UN Secretariat has seen an improvement in overall corporate culture since the MDP's 2009 relaunch. "Increased staff satisfaction has been a significant outcome of the MDP. ... Our managers really appreciate the way the organization has been willing to invest in them," she adds. The perception of coaching within the organization has also changed. "Unlike in the private sector, where it's perceived that people chosen for coaching are high-potential individuals, people within our organization saw being selected for coaching to mean you're not doing well," Hutchinson says. The MDP is changing this perception. "People at the UN are very engaged in and serious about the coaching process," Darling says.

The UN Secretariat has not been immune to the consequences of the global economic crisis. However, so far the organization has been able to safeguard its commitment to management development and coaching. In fact, coaching has spread within the organization. Hutchinson has turned over leadership of the MDP to Staff Development Officer Carina Stern, and she now directly oversees only the Leadership Development Program for top officials within the organization. LDP participants are asked to commit to five hours of coaching in the midst of their training. Coaching skills have also been integrated into a supervisor-skills training program within the organization. What's more, leaders at all levels of the organization take what they learn from coaching back to their teams, helping to build on the foundation of a new coaching culture within the UN Secretariat and to develop visionary leaders well-equipped to achieve personal and organizational goals.

Formed in 1995, today the International Coach Federation (ICF) is the leading global organization, with more than 20,000* members, dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high professional standards, providing independent certification, and building a network of credentialed coaches. We exist to support and advance the coaching profession through programs and standards supported by our members and to be an authoritative source on coaching information and research for the public.

**Numbers as of December 2012. Numbers are subject to change month to month.*



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