



The arrival of two professional bodies, and a prime-time TV show, prove there is a strong national interest in coaching

Illustration Lucie Sheridan

FINDING AN AUDIENCE

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Israel is a land of paradoxes. It has experienced prolonged conflict and peace. A self-sufficient food producer, the "Land of Milk and Honey" is also a hotbed of industry and recently registered unparalleled growth in its industrial output (37 per cent according to the *Economist*) with high-tech industries strongly in the lead. Israel's economy is a global one.

Multiculturalism comes naturally to Israelis, who have welcomed home the remnants of Jewish communities exiled in ancient times to India, Ethiopia, Europe and Africa, and have encouraged the shards of the persecuted and war-ravaged Jewish communities from Europe, Africa and Asia to make a fresh start in post-colonial Israel. Languages, food, dress styles, music, architecture and art all mix and contrast, somehow managing to produce a creative ambience that has forged a management philosophy unique to Israel.

Coaching has flourished in the past 12 years, mostly because of the need for personal development among Israeli managers forced to deal, on the one hand, with global business environments and the need to show "European" or "American" management gains and, on the other hand, with the special brand of Israeli multiculturalism. Over the past five years, coaching has constantly evolved to improve achievements and well-being on both an individual and organisational level.

It's won quite an audience. Israeli TV has a popular prime-time coaching show on the entertainment channel, and three international coaching conferences have taken place in the past 12 months. Two professional associations, the Israeli Coaching Association and Israeli Chamber of Coaching, have been established, with more than 1,500 member coaches in total.

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Coaching practice in Israel uses coaching and mentoring interchangeably, mostly emphasises personal development, is skills-orientated and solution focused. In general, most practitioners serve as mentors and life style coaches.

At our practice, coaching is firmly rooted in the humanistic constructivist philosophy. It is focused on the schools system and seeks to engage managers of learning environments in the search for excellence in education. We coach school principals and Ministry of Education inspectors, department heads and teachers and parent associations. The quality of education is a moral and a social imperative.

We practice our KATOM coaching model in schools that start out with very low achievement. Students in these schools are usually new immigrants from either Eastern Europe or Ethiopia, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, and schools within the Israeli Arab or Israeli Druze communities.

Typically, we facilitate the management team's re-examination of the school's vision and collaboratively create an action plan to actualise that vision in each learning environment, with a view to transfer learning outcomes into the community.

We coach the school's management team step by step toward benchmarks of good practice identified by the team itself. The process is transformational and the school becomes an effective learning organisation focused on the quality of its learning outcomes, whether they are pedagogical, cultural (values) or administrative.

Our work is shared freely among the community of practitioners and our collective body of knowledge is being managed into book form to spread it more effectively. ■