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BALANCE: A NEW COACHING TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE CAREER MANAGEMENT



**ROB NATHAN
EXPLAINS THE
DEVELOPMENT OF
THIS NEW TOOL**

Dave is 42. He has been at the same level in his employer for the past four years, working as an Area Sales Manager for a large hotel chain. He has put in many extra hours to reach his targets. Dave asserts that someone of his experience deserves promotion, but says he is blocked as his employer has cut down levels of management. He believes that his relationship with his immediate manager may be contributing to this block. He has two young children 8 and 6, and his wife runs a small catering business from home. Dave is also concerned that he has to spend too much time away from home. He comes to career coaching saying that he has had enough of the pressure to bring in more and more business, and wants to look at alternative career options.

This is not an uncommon scenario that is presented for career coaching. From my 30+ years of career coaching and training career coaches, one of the commonest themes is that people with a career ‘problem’ will seek to resolve it by considering routes of escape, and they will often want the career coach to decide which is the best route for ‘someone like me’. So far, so familiar?

The irony is, that after a few sessions of career coaching, people are often re-invigorated and have more resolve to make their current employment work. However, they are often ill-equipped to do so. The career coaching may have given them clearer self-knowledge and direction, but it is unlikely to equip people to be better career managers. Yet, in some cases, that may be the way forward.

A new approach

My colleague Gilly Freedman and I drew on our combined experience together with a questionnaire completed by 40 people in mid-career to identify the key factors that contribute to career success. Our hunch that people focus too much on the needs of the employer at the expense of self, and the converse – focusing too much on one’s own needs without sufficient consideration of the needs of the employer, was confirmed. An effective career manager takes a ‘balanced’ approach, paying sufficient attention to the needs of both self and employer.

The result is the *Balance* coaching tool.

We identified six factors:

1. Building relationships
2. Learning and development
3. Career development strategy
4. Use of personal energy
5. Openness to change
6. Work life balance

The tool consists of a behaviourally-based self-scored questionnaire. It is designed to be used as part of a coaching programme or workshop, and comes with 30 coaching tools, which coaches can use to address any of the areas that coach and coachee decide need developing. Examples of exercises include:

- Improving a relationship; creating a stakeholder map
- How to ask for feedback; addressing blocks to learning
- Developing my personal brand/reputation; writing the next chapter of my career story
- My five minute energy boost; energy raisers
- Planned happenstance: skills for adapting to change; worst case scenario
- My work- life balance ‘commandments’.

As far as we know, this is the only questionnaire which fills the space between the employer’s need to maximise productivity and the individual’s need to maximise job satisfaction. There are many tools available for self-development (focus on self) and on assessment (focus on employer).

Back to Dave: there may be many reasons why Dave is not happy at work. It is in both Dave’s and his employer’s interests to address what they are and ways to move forward. Otherwise, the employer is in danger of losing a valued employee, and Dave may make the wrong decision.

Supportive relationships

The single most common response to our research about which factors contributed most to career success was the importance of a supportive relationship with your manager. Dave may ‘blame’ his manager for not supporting his progression. But what has Dave done to nurture and build that relationship? How does his manager view Dave? Dave feels torn between his desire to spend more time with his family and his wish to



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gain promotion. But how 'smartly' is Dave working? Is he typical of the many people in mid-career who run themselves ragged at the behest of their employer? How clear is Dave about his career development strategy? How open has he been to learning and development and to the changes that re-layering has led to?

Consider also Hamzah: Hamzah graduated with 1st Class Honours in English. From university, he applied to several blue chip companies, not because he was convinced it was the right direction, but somehow he became swept up in the Milk Round. He joined a global company's fast track programme three years ago and shortly will complete the training, which he hasn't really enjoyed. He has some ambivalence about staying in the company. He would consider remaining for another couple of years if he moved to a faster paced part of the business, such as marketing, where he believes he would be stretched. He also thinks it would look good on his CV and thus help his career progression.

Hamzah's career expectations may be at the opposite end of the spectrum to Dave's. He appears to be considering only those options which match his current aspirations without apparently taking into account his employer's needs and growth areas. It is of course possible that Hamzah does not have sufficient clarity about himself and the direction in which he would like to go. A more traditional approach to career coaching may be useful for Hamzah at this point – to enable him to gain more clarity about his key motivators, values and career drivers. But in addition it could be extremely

useful for Hamzah to know about a balanced approach to career management. For example, what could he do to find out more about growth areas across his employer? What thought has he given to his personal career 'brand' or reputation? What is the quality of his relationships outside of his immediate peer group and line manager?

We are finding that employers are taking up our coaching programme to support and develop people like Hamzah as part of a Talent Development Programme. The employer has already invested a good deal of time, money and people resources in recruiting and training him. We believe that *Balance* can assist to drive home the message of the importance of good career management behaviours, combined with effective self-management.

Behaviours

Because *Balance* focuses on behaviours (it is not a measure of personality or attitudes), and it is self-scored, it puts the individual in control of the coaching discussion. The outputs can be very easily combined with personal development plans, in-house career discussions, external career coaching and talent management programmes.

For further details about *Balance* or how to become a Licensed *Balance* Coach, please contact rob@career-counselling-services.co.uk

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