

Chapter 23

Coaching for Change at Joseph Rowntree

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ABSTRACT

This case history provides insight into the internal coaching program at Joseph Rowntree Foundation/ Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRF/JRHT). It covers a period of seven years from an initial idea through its gradual evolution up to the present day. The program has been overseen throughout by a dedicated Head of Coaching, the case history author. JRF/JRHT is a not-for-profit charitable trust based in the UK and was founded in 1904 by the well-known philanthropist and confectioner, Joseph Rowntree.

INTRODUCTION

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) is an independent trust working to inspire social change through research, policy and practice. The Trust is funded by an endowment. The Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) is a registered housing association and care provider in Yorkshire and the North East of England in the United Kingdom (UK), working with the JRF to inspire social change. JRF has a strong heritage. It was established in 1904 by the renowned confectioner, philanthropist and Quaker, Joseph Rowntree, to search out the underlying causes of social ‘evils’ and influence social advancement.

As part of his social reform work, Joseph Rowntree built New Earswick, a village in York, for people on low incomes, including staff who worked in his factory, giving them access to decent homes at affordable rents. He was committed to understanding the causes of poverty and disadvantage in order to create a better society. His son, Seebohm Rowntree, was a pioneering social researcher who undertook one of the country’s first investigations into poverty. The Housing Trust (JRHT) shares JRF’s vision of a prosperous, poverty-free UK and works with its residents to help them make ends meet. It manages around 2,500 homes, half of which are located in New Earswick, with the rest located across North East England, including York, Scarborough, Beverley, Leeds and Hartlepool.

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JRF's vision today is for a prosperous UK without poverty, where everyone can thrive and contribute and as such, demonstrates how the organization continues to be driven by its founder's vision and how relevant that is today as it was in 1904. The organizations (JRF/JRHT) currently employ just under 800 staff. Its Head Office is based in York, and it also has a base in London.

EVIDENCE-BASED OCD INITIATIVE

Triggers and Drivers of the EBOCD Programme

JRF/JRHT has a progressive internal coach programme which was introduced in 2011, after a re-structuring process which included a review of the cost and impact of outsource services, one of which was coaching.

Prior to 2011, some external coaching was being accessed on an ad hoc basis, generally commissioned by individual managers or directors, who saw it as a stand-alone concept designed to help those who were struggling with some of their management skills or responsibilities. Consequently, there was little or no internal oversight or measurement as to the quality or calibre of the coaches. The lack of any central selection, monitoring or evaluation process meant that there was little or no evidence available to support the effectiveness of this resource.

These coaches were appointed on a consultancy basis at significant cost and coaching became a little-known concept aimed only at senior staff, often as part of management performance review, or even as an alternative to management, but with no overall clear purpose. As such, coaching was an expensive, targeted and exclusive intervention which was outside the reach of most staff. Anecdotal evidence from staff suggested that coaching was generally seen as a 'remedial' initiative and this created an element of stigma around those accessing it.

This system did not sit well with the developing culture, which was changing from a hierarchical and paternalistic organization to a more modern, vibrant business with a more autonomous approach and therefore conditions were ideal for implementation of an OD intervention which would complement the emerging culture.

Part of this process included a review of staff morale which highlighted issues in some areas. It was clear that a strategic initiative to help the organization achieve sustainable change was required. At the time, workplace coaching was increasing in popularity and was "beginning to move from being the latest management fad to a mainstream component of organization development and talent management" (Cavanagh, Grant & Kemp, 2005, p. v). Therefore, largely due to the foresight of the Chief Executive who had significant knowledge and experience in this field, a coaching programme was introduced as one of a number of developmental initiatives designed to help change the organizational culture.

The purpose of this internal coaching programme was to aid the organization's aspiration to transform from its existing organizational culture, to one in which staff felt engaged and empowered, by handing more responsibility for initiative and decision-making to staff. The Chief Executive at the time had a long-term commitment to coaching and a strong view that it could be beneficial to staff working at all levels. Together with colleagues, she discussed this with York and Scarborough Hospital Trust, where JRF had some partnership links, recognising that in financially constrained times, JRF could not afford to pay but it could barter.

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