

# Coaching: the in-house method

## Key strategic part of business as usual at Absa

**CAN internal coaching be used as a cost effective and strategic tool to steer an organisation through lean times? Absa believes so and has just been nominated for an ICF Prism award for its innovative internal coaching strategy.**

To navigate its way through challenging times, Absa is investing in talent. Throughout Absa, internal coaching has become a key strategic part of business as usual.

According to specialist, coaching, mentoring and talent development's Maria Cussell Humphries, this approach is saving the organisation money, while bolstering its in-house human resource capabilities.

The programme was designed by the Centre for Coaching, situated at the UCT Graduate School of Business, and piloted in the organisation in 2010. The idea, according to Humphries, enabled Absa to offer leadership coaching and develop talent in a more cost effective way.

The Centre for Coaching programme makes use of a unique approach, Coaching Circles, which allows coaches to build trust among their peers, to receive immediate feedback about their approach and to understand fully, through practical experience, the role of a coach.

"Adults learn better under certain conditions," said Janine Everson, co-director of the Centre for Coaching. "Being observed and being given feedback is pivotal to adult learning. And this needs to take place in an environment in which they feel safe enough to explore issues, to ask in-depth questions."

According to Everson, Coaching Circles, a relatively new technique for coaching in South Africa, creates a platform that supports development in real time and allows the individual to assess their long-term performance and develop competencies in required areas of their lives.

Since 2010, Absa has fostered a core of 40 internal coaches, who undergo ongoing coaching supervision and master classes to maintain high coaching standards. They in turn spread the coaching philosophy throughout their teams and units.

According to Humphries, the costs of providing external coaching to 50 individuals is estimated to be R3.5-million, and to send qualified coaches to other countries becomes exponentially more expensive.

"There are few coaches in Africa, outside of

South Africa, that are International Coach Federation (ICF) credentialed to professional level. So by creating a coaching culture throughout the Africa region, by using an accredited organisation such as the Centre for Coaching, we can continue to offer coaching even when budgets are tight."

Over the next few months Humphries will travel to countries such as Botswana, Uganda and Ghana to assess the levels of interest in coaching.

According to co-director of Centre for Coaching Craig O'Flaherty, the coaching programme at Absa is being monitored and forms part of Centre for Coaching research, testing the effectiveness of Coaching Circles. Already, he said, there are obvious benefits.

"These coaching circles are powerful mediums that not only transform people, but the workplace," said O'Flaherty.

"They facilitate a change in the workplace where the capacity to

listen, question, to hold dialogue, and to give and receive feedback, are greatly developed."

He also said that they create stronger teams because they encourage understanding and compassion among team members, enabling greater participation within the team.

Absa is certified as a Best Employer in SA by the CRF Institute, which identifies choice employers via the International HR Policy and Practice Research.

And the organisation has been nominated by the Centre for Coaching for the International Coach Federation Prism award, which recognises organisations that have successfully used coaching as a leadership strategy.

Each year, the ICF honours organisations which have demonstrated that professional coaching, used as a leadership strategy, pays off.

"It's great to be acknowledged for our use of coaching to strengthen the organisation. I expect the returns on investment to grow year-on-year from here onwards," said Humphries.