



Managers in Russian businesses want to be heard, and the coaching profession is starting to respond

TO RUSSIA WITH LOVE

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Talking to a Russian friend in business here, I asked if it was fair to say that Russian business people were motivated entirely by money. "Oh yes," he replied, "of course."

This outlook, and its related behaviour, are the source of many of my coaching conversations in Moscow. Some of the expatriate executives I work with are employed by Russian companies, sometimes with opaque or dual private/State (or silent partner) ownership. Their survival requires a very clear understanding of the context they are in.

Expatriate executives often find their CEOs to be uncompromising, coercive, micromanagers. They struggle to reconcile their leader's short-term perspective with their own preference for long-term sustainable planning and talent development.

Their Russian staff, on the other hand, have learnt to function within the CEO's management style, and rarely question it. Most expect to be told what to do rather than be asked to use their initiative. Trust and loyalty are a feature of personal relationships, not of the indigenous organisational fabric.

Expatriate managers who have sought coaching from me want mainly to be heard and to build their personal resilience in a challenging environment.

In my work with Russian-led multinationals, I have observed a growing awareness, but little real understanding, of coaching concepts in practice. Listening is often an under-developed skill – people are more used to recounting 'the way it is'. They may not have experienced being listened to and coaching has provided an excellent platform for them to open up their hearts and minds and create a shift in their own

management practice. The majority have a hunger to learn more creatively and to absorb Western management styles and techniques.

The perception of many Russian coaches I talk to is that the coaching culture in business is growing, albeit slowly. Some multinationals retain a pool of external coaches to help embed a coaching management style into the organisation. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that as few as 10 per cent of Russian businesses have used coaching successfully and would be prepared to do so again. A far higher number are wary, having been poorly coached by unqualified individuals. This scepticism is very challenging for newly qualified Russian coaches – as a result, around 75 per cent leave the profession within the first year of qualifying.

The International Coach Federation has a presence in Russia and its current president, in post since January 2011, is actively encouraging Russian coaches to achieve accreditation.

There are 10 established coaching schools in Russia, mainly in Moscow, St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, and many younger ones. Among the most established is The Russian School of Coaching 'East-West' in Moscow, which co-founded the Professional Association of Russian-Speaking Coaches (PARC). One of PARC's activities is organising biannual coaching conferences. The European Mentoring and Coaching Council past president, Petr Necas, was a keynote speaker at the most recent one in November 2011.

Russia asks a lot of you – physically, mentally and emotionally – and my personal learning has been rich. Life here is never dull. An early British ambassador likened Russia to an infection: once it's in your blood, it never leaves you. I agree. ■

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