

Business coaching for leaders of small businesses

KS Associates and 3C Partners have jointly developed a new approach to provide business coaching for leaders of small businesses. Two consultants, one with a business, finance, coaching and counselling background and the other with strategy, marketing, organisational consulting and business psychology experience, work as a team. Our objective is to help small business leaders, typically owner-managers, identify how best to develop their businesses. Some of our clients have an existing business, others want to set up a new business selling their skills or developing a new business concept.

Our overall approach is to enable clients to find new ways of thinking about their business and review the progress of their businesses and their own progress as individuals over a period of six to nine months. We aim to:

- Enable the client to clarify ideas and objectives;
- Facilitate a full business analysis;
- Develop the client's individual and organisational skills and expertise by helping them reflect on their situation;
- Encourage the client to consider work/life balance;
- Ensure that the client fully considers life issues and goals in relation to their current stage of life.

The process we have developed has the following components:

- A free initial one hour fact-finding session. This enables us to understand the client's situation and objectives, and provides the client with an introduction to our way of working.
- Further meetings, each of 1.5 hours duration, at intervals of 2 - 3 months, that enable the client to set objectives and explore individual and organisational needs. The intervals between meetings are intended to give clients enough time to make changes in their business and see the results before the next coaching session.
- One or two one-hour telephone coaching sessions during the intervals between meetings.

We use Appreciative Inquiry techniques to help clients identify where they want to take their business: more specifically to find out where the strengths and potential of the client lie, where their energy is focused, their vision of their future business, and the practicalities of implementing it.

Where the client has an established business, we also explore any barriers to developing the business to achieve the client's vision. Given the critical role of owner-managers in small businesses, we are alert to situations where the client's own behaviours are holding back the business: for example, a shy and introverted business owner may be reluctant to go out and make new sales. We help the client find ways of overcoming these barriers, for example by identifying circumstances where the client has successfully done so in the past.