

PEELING THE ONION OF TIME MANAGEMENT

HESTON BLUMENTHAL, CHEF AT THE FAT DUCK

Heston Blumenthal, one of the country's most high profile chefs, owner of the renowned Fat Duck restaurant in Bray and recipient of three rare and much-coveted Michelin stars, talks exclusively to Coachlines about the role that coaching is playing in his life.

When did you first start thinking about coaching?

It was some time last year. The restaurant was incredibly busy and I was starting work at 7.30 am and getting back home at 2.30 am. With luck I would get four hours sleep but as you can imagine, it is really difficult to switch off when you've just left the stressful, hectic



environment of a restaurant kitchen. I had listened to a cassette on lifestyle and time management, and although my first inclination was to dismiss it as some sort of American rubbish, it really struck a chord with me.

My life was increasingly cluttered. The award of the third star – which was unexpected and much earlier than I had ever hoped for – just rocketed the Fat Duck to a completely different level. I guess you could say that I was rather like a toddler who is so excited by everything new that comes along, that they just grab at things and constantly move from one thing to another. I was definitely in this mode. The phrase 'headless chicken' would not go amiss!

How was your 'lack of time management' manifesting itself?

In essence, the business of running the business was taking me away from what I really enjoy, which is the cooking and everything associated with that. For example, I'd have to sort out paint chips, lack of hot water, the phone not working and a million and one other similar issues. I was completely out of control with all this 'stuff'. I needed to take control.

So how is working with Coaching for Success helping you?

I've worked with Mike Duckett for the last nine months or so and over time he's helped me to appreciate far more clearly how to identify the main issues and the chief priorities. It was rather like peeling an onion – he helped me work through all the clutter, helped me unscramble my brain – and has brought some more order to my life.

As just one small example of being 'event driven', I used to spend hours wading through fifty or sixty emails, believing that I had to answer them all. Working with Mike, I've learnt how to filter out what is really important – and, in fact, when the quickest and best option is just to pick up the phone and speak to someone.

Without doubt, although time is still a major issue for me (and probably always will be), I am no longer in a purely 'reactive' mode. I have found that although there are of course still daily problems to deal with, that I now have a much clearer vision of what they are and I am much better able to compartmentalise them – and then deal with them in a more logical, prioritised manner.

Heston Blumenthal milestones

- 1995 – Fat Duck opens in Bray
- 1998 – 1st Michelin star awarded
- 2001 – 2nd Michelin star awarded
- Guardian Restaurant of the year
- Good Food Guide Restaurant of the year
- AA Restaurant of the Year
- AA Wine List of the year
- Good Food Guide Chef of the year
- AA Chef of the year
- Brasserie opens in Bray Marina
- First book is published
- Six part TV series for Discovery Channel
- 2004 3rd Michelin star awarded

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Roll up your sleeves – democratic leadership is the way forward

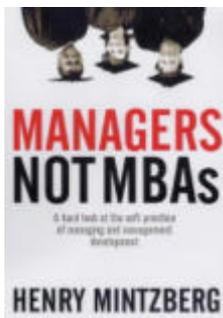
A recent article in Director magazine highlights the changes in leadership which have taken place in recent years. One director states that “someone regarded as a good leader ten years ago wouldn’t necessarily make a good job of it today. Directors are now working in a time of anti-leadership where the good leaders stand out as those who do not lead from the front. They are architects of change and they look at how organisations can learn as a whole.”

He believes that good leaders nowadays can not only lead, but that they must also be able to follow – and switch between the two. “Nowadays it is important for people to believe that it is their company especially if there is a risk that a highly skilled workforce will become disheartened and leave. Then you are left with nothing. My approach is to teach them about the business as a whole. In this way, their work is put into context and they can see how getting something right will benefit not only them, but also their colleagues, the company and its clients. It is also important to put key decisions into the hands of relevant members of staff. The chairman, for example, will not have to drive one of the delivery vans – so it makes much more sense to give this sort of decision to the service engineers.”



One of Coaching for Success’ clients is Chris Thompson, MD of Beechcroft, a property development company employing some fifty staff with an annual turnover of £35 million. He, and his co-directors, can frequently be found ‘mucking in’, especially at special events such as the opening of a show house. Chris commented: “Although it raises a few eyebrows from the staff, I really enjoy getting involved in these events, although I do recognise that it is important to strike a balance and only nip in when some help is really needed. That said, however, I can often be found painting hoardings at show houses and on one memorable occasion, was hoovering the cobbles before the house opened to visitors. At our last opening, I was back on hoarding painting duty, the Sales Director was planting and the Construction Director was mending a leak in the downstairs cloakroom. I think this hands-on approach at the right time proves to our customers that we really do care” passionately about each individual house – and it can also help motivate our staff.”

Holiday reading



Make sure there is space in your suitcase for the book entitled ‘Managers not MBAs’ by Henry Mintzberg and recently published by FT/Prentice Hall. Having spent thirty-five years as a management guru, Mintzberg’s book supports his belief that the ‘prestigious’ (and certainly costly) Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, is worthless as a qualification to manage. He believes that management in all its complexity can only be learnt on the job and only later, when the skills and experience are there to be shared with others, is a classroom a useful forum. This is a most entertaining dissection of the MBA courses based on his own experiences. Watch out for such gems as “No-one should be allowed out of an MBA programme without having a skull and crossbones stamped on his or her forehead over the words: “Warning. NOT prepared to manage.”

And by the way, it’s worth remembering that Enron’s disgraced chief executive, Jeff Skilling, was one of the ‘starriest’ MBAs of his generation.

Ed: This book is available for purchase on our website

Email overload? Try talking

It is estimated that a typical 500-employee company will receive between 10-12,000 emails every day. Email overload is a real and everyday problem. Apart from the volume, however, email messages are open to misinterpretation because they miss out so much in the way we communicate, such as tone of voice, gestures, body language etc. Quite often email can be a cop-out – a way of communicating something difficult that in reality should be handled either on the phone or face to face. So how do you decide when to use email – or when to opt for more traditional means of communication?

Ed: A number of successful companies are instituting ‘email policies’ and some are even banning its use internally.

A good idea might be to ask yourself ‘does this message contain anything more than facts’? If so you would be well advised to express it’s intended meaning using your voice! Remember the adage:

The meaning of communication is the response you get

ABOUT HEALTH

Regrets? Well, maybe just a few

Given all the recent coverage about the problems of obesity a recent study makes interesting reading. It indicates that people who anticipate feeling regret if they don't exercise are more likely to report stronger intentions to exercise over the next two weeks. This 'predictive power' remained significant even after taking into account such factors as attitudes to exercise, how much they had exercised in the past, others' views of them and so on. A follow on study indicated that students who had said they would regret it if they didn't exercise, subsequently reported stronger intentions to exercise than students who were asked about their intentions first and their anticipated regret second.

What does this mean? The conclusion of the authors is that 'focusing people's attention on anticipated regret in relation to not exercising may promote and strengthen their intentions to exercise'. So before you find yet another excuse not to go to the gym or out for a brisk walk, just think how much you'll regret it!

Ed: There is also a link here with the notion that some people find strong motivation from 'moving away' from situations that cause them difficulties. In this example, they intend to exercise to move away from the regret of not doing so. Although this approach may work in the short term, a negative source of energy to motivate oneself can be transient and quit draining. Many of our clients find it more productive to build on a 'moving towards' motivation which obviously utilises a positive thought process. Thus, we would encourage people to anticipate how good they will feel after exercise. This is likely to not only provide longer-term motivation but also avoid the yoyo effect which is a characteristic of the 'moving away' approach.

Put pen to paper and improve your health

A study conducted in the US has concluded that writing about wonderful experiences can reduce ill health. Half a group of students were asked to write about intensely positive experiences for twenty minutes a day over the course of three days. The other half wrote about mundane issues such as their shoes or the content of their bedrooms! During the three months that followed the experiment, those that had written about positive happenings made significantly fewer visits to the health centre than the other group. The authors concluded that positive writing benefited health because it helped individuals understand themselves better, gain a more clearly articulated sense of self and discover their life's goals.

Ed: This may well be one of the benefits found by the clients we work with on drafting their LifePlan

Mind over muscle?

Researchers at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation in the USA claim to have shown that simply by imagining carrying out an exercise (rather than actually performing it), people can improve their muscle strength. Participants in the study undertook a twelve-week mental training programme where they had to imagine pushing their little finger against a resisting force as hard as possible. At the end of the period, their finger strength had increased by 40% compared with before; the control group who had not undertaken the programme showed no significant changes. The authors suggest that the mental training led to increased electrical brain activity which increased muscle strength when the actual (practiced) movement was performed.

Ed: So you see, more evidence that the visualisation work we do with clients has real effects— even in the muscle!

Smile!

A paper published in Cognition and Emotion reports that researchers found that after five minutes smilers still rated themselves happier than before they started to smile – which goes to show that the effect of smiling doesn't just last for a few seconds.

TRAINING INSIGHTS

The importance of feedback

The British Journal of Educational Psychology encourages teachers to give students comprehensive feedback on their work, making clear which parts are good and which need improvement – and why. Recent research shows that students who don't understand why a piece of work is good, tend to believe that it was just luck and do not know how to maintain this standard.

Ed: It is generally accepted that we put more thought into giving people negative feedback, rather than when we have positive comments to give. It's important to note the difference between saying 'good job' or 'well done' both of which are expressions of praise, but which certainly do not constitute feedback. As the research mentioned above indicates, if someone does something good, it is equally as important to let him or her know which aspects were good (and which might need improvement) as it is to prepare to tell them it was appalling!

The post-training course period – seize the moment

Data from adult learning studies in the US has revealed that unless people begin to apply what they have learned promptly following a training course, their new knowledge rapidly dissipates and with it the value for the organisation. The importance of the 'post-course' period is becoming recognised – from both the participant's point of

“unless people begin to apply what they have learned promptly following a training course, their new knowledge rapidly dissipates and with it the value for the organisation.”

view and the benefits which will be reaped by the company. Ensuring that knowledge learnt on a course really is put into practice in the work environment can be difficult to sustain .. and some organisations may even think of investing in more training to make this happen. This can become an expensive, frustrating and not very productive process.

Ed: Coaching can neatly dovetail into training courses. After the concepts, processes or philosophy have been learnt on the course – then is the time to learn 'how to do it' in the real world. Coaching can be immensely valuable in ensuring that maximum value is achieved from sending people on training courses. So before you book yet another training course for an employee or team of people, why not stop to consider whether what you really need is coaching?

ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGY

Positive Psychology

Launched in the US in 1998, the positive psychology movement is the scientific pursuit of the most promising routes for a distinctly happy, healthy and accomplished life which benefits not only the individual but also the wider community. This is an interesting approach, given that traditionally psychology has tended to focus on the study and repair of human deficits and problems. The endeavour to understand human happiness should not be underestimated. Happier people are more popular, less prone to divorce, fall prey to less illness and lead much longer and more proactive lives.

Rather than just studying the rather loose phrase 'well being', the positive psychology movement has coined the expression 'the science of well-being' to indicate the systematic, demonstration and peer-reviewed work which they undertake. Workers in this area investigate how well-being is derived not only from an individual's psychological skills, but through their bodies, social and physical environments. In other words, well-being is tackled holistically.

At a recent international conference, specialists in economics, sociology, peacemaking, animal behaviour, neuroscience, psychiatry and psychology got together to discuss the theme of "The science of well-being – interacting neurobiology, psychology and social sciences." To read the conference speeches, visit www.royalsoc.ac.uk.

To learn more about positive psychology, visit www.positivepsychology.org.

Sporting motivation – is there a wider lesson?

Director magazine recently provided some insight into how a number of sporting legends motivate themselves and what lessons this can provide for the commercial world.

Sir Clive Woodward, England Rugby Team, Head Coach

"I'm a great believer that once you have carefully assembled a team of the right people who share a common goal, then motivation takes care of itself."

Gavin Hasting, Former Scotland and British Lions captain

"If you always communicate well – follow up meetings and make contact with folk – you'll leave a good impression. It's simple, but it means a lot."

Sir Steve Redgrave, Olympic gold medallist rower.

"Business and sport are both about strategy, perseverance, single-mindedness and hard work. You can't stand still – you have to always be looking to break down new barriers. In a team everyone has the same goal but they have their own motivation. So different personalities have to be brought together to form a unit. If you get your strategy and teamwork right, you get the opportunity to produce results."

Chris Moon, extreme athlete

"Motivation is internal, you can't put it inside someone. You can help, though – real-life examples can increase confidence. Apply a can-do attitude. Teamwork is everything in achieving a common goal."

Repertory Grid

Repertory grid analysis is based on the theory of personal constructs which suggests that individuals interpret the world in terms of their own personal set of constructs. Constructs are described as bipolar abstractions that a given individual uses to distinguish between similar and different elements in the world. The extent to which two individuals share a similar set of constructs indicates the extent to which they experience and understand the world in similar ways. The repertory grid technique is a method for exploring an individual's personal construct system and its organisation in order to understand the world of meaning in which that individual lives. Repertory grid analysis allows a coach to 'unpack' the system of constructs a given client uses to make sense of some particular event, context or set of objects in the world – for example, leadership, friendship, etc.

If you'd like to know more about repertory grid analysis, how you might be able to use it – then please contact Coaching for Success. Not surprisingly there are now a large number of computer programs on the market which can automate much of the process and the analysis of the results

P.S. Remember - you can now purchase the books we refer to and review via our website.



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