

↗ sowing seeds

coaching

Developing People for Success in
Public Service Delivery



Public Service Management Wales
Rheoli yng Ngwasanaeth Cyhoeddus Cymru



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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Coaching helps to build self-reliance, self-belief, self-responsibility and confidence

➤ Introduction

The ability to be successful is dependent upon being effective in the way we work. One way in which we can improve personal effectiveness is through learning and development. This can take many forms depending upon our needs and circumstances. Coaching provides a unique route to building knowledge, insight and expertise through a structured learning relationship with someone else.

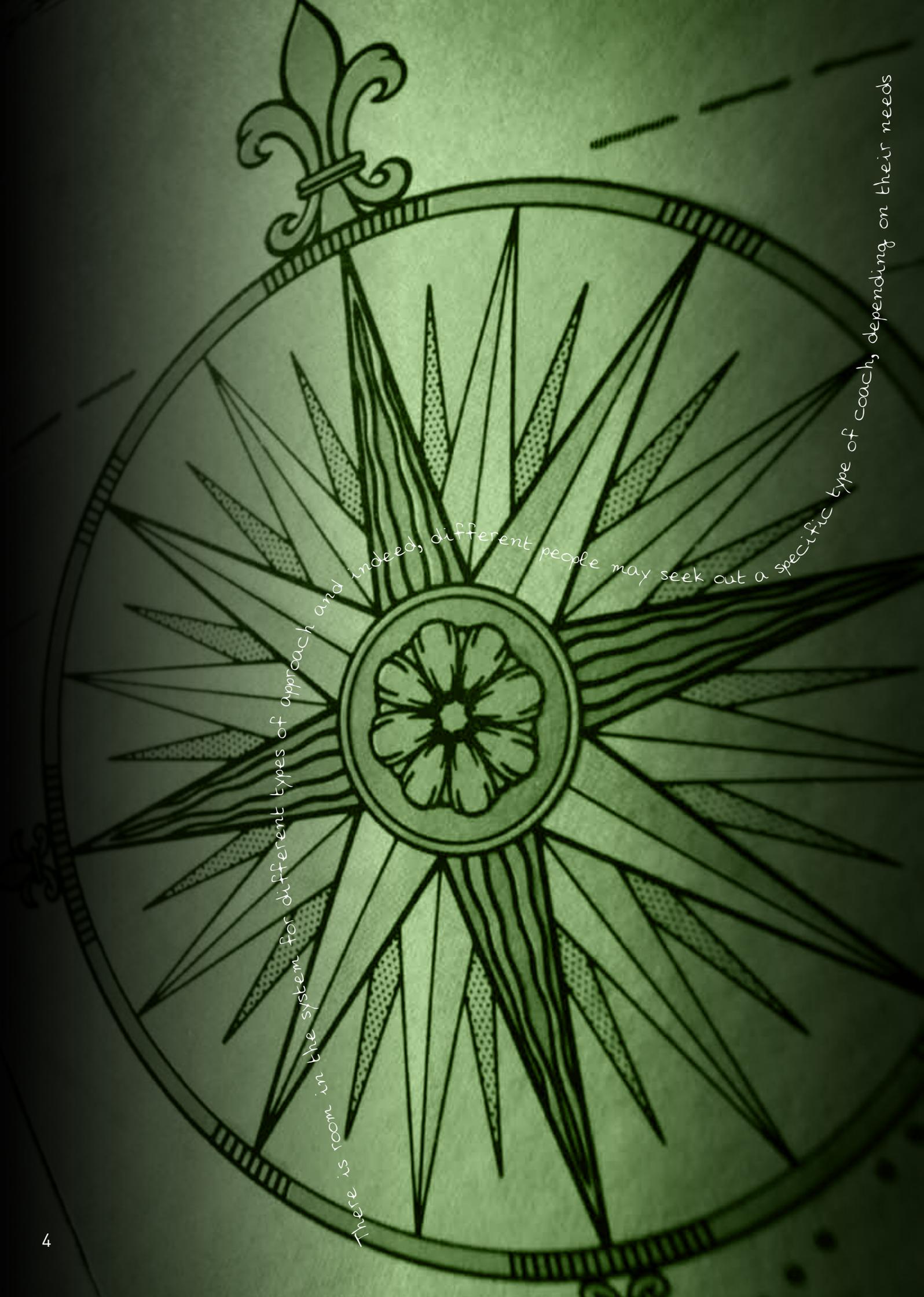
➤ What is coaching?

The term “coaching” means different things to different people. A Google search will throw up a plethora of information. Gallwey (1975), a Harvard educationalist described coaching as “unlocking a person’s potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.”

The idea of learning and improved performance is also reflected by Parsloe (1999) who describes coaching as “a process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve.”

Meggison and Baydell (1979) described coaching as a flexible process “whereby an individual, through direct discussion and guided activity, helps a colleague to learn to solve a problem or to do a task, better than would otherwise be the case”. As Guest (1999) points out, coaching “concerns itself with amplifying the individual’s own knowledge and thought processes. It is about creating a supportive environment in which to challenge and develop critical thinking skills, ideas and behaviours.”

Coaching helps to build self-reliance, self-belief, self-responsibility and confidence; it is an intervention that develops within the coachee a sustainable approach to addressing challenges and securing success. The coach is not there to provide answers, to solve problems, to teach or to instruct; the coach is a facilitator, a sounding board, an awareness-raiser. If the coach is acting as an objective, detached awareness-raiser, they do not necessarily need technical knowledge or experience in the field of the person with whom they are working. Whitmore (2004) points out that “every time input is provided the responsibility of the coachee is reduced”.



There is room in the system for different types of approach and indeed, different people may seek out a specific type of coach, depending on their needs

➤ Coaching approaches

There are different approaches to coaching, different models and techniques; some coaches prefer to stick to one approach while others meld aspects of different approaches depending on the needs of their coachee. The important issue is that coaching offers a vehicle for analysis, reflection and action that ultimately enables the client to achieve success in one or more areas of their life or work. There is room in the system for different types of approach and indeed, different people may seek out a specific

type of coach, depending on their needs, knowledge and what others tell them. That said, it is important for the individual seeking support to be clear about what support they need and what their objectives are. Unless there is a clear understanding of requirements and expectations (both on the part of the individual and their organisation) then false assumptions can result in confusion for the coachee, coach and the organisation for which the individual works.

➤ How does coaching work?

Coaching relies on the development of a unique relationship between coach and coachee. It is different from all other relationships you might have with colleagues, partners, family and friends. Many coachees share information with their coach that they have never felt secure enough to share with anyone else; this might be how they feel about their job and how they do it; about how they think others perceive them and their insecurities.

To progress, it is critically important to have an honest and truthful dialogue, even if this is difficult. In order for this sharing of sometimes deeply personal information, the coach must make the coachee feel safe. The creation by the coach of a safe and secure space in which the coaching can take place is one of the essential prerequisites for a successful coaching relationship and relies very much on the inherent personal attributes of the coach.



At the heart of coaching there must be trust; trust that the coach will do whatever is needed to help you move your agenda forward, that they have your best interests at heart and that they will treat whatever you tell them in the strictest confidence.

The ability of the coach to establish rapport is essential for a successful coaching relationship to develop. That intangible “chemistry” is often what makes the difference between a good coaching relationship and a magically powerful one.

There are numerous coaching models available; the coach will use whatever model, tools and techniques they feel will best serve your needs. They will usually discuss these with you and ask your permission to try out techniques with you first.

Two critical ingredients for good coaching are active listening and powerful questioning. The coach will be curious to fully understand your issue and will watch and be aware of your responses to questions, silences and challenges. We all give off signals, saying as much with our body language as with the words we use. Coaches are in tune with this and will pick up on this unspoken dialogue.

Your coach is unlikely to accept the initial answer you give to a question as being your final response and will continue to drill down to get a deeper understanding of where you're at and what this is all about. This process is similar to peeling off the layers of an onion, each successive question and answer getting closer to the real heart of the issue. Sometimes when this point is reached, it's a revelation to the coachee; sometimes the coachee has an inkling about what the issue is but has been unable to surface it previously. Either way, when it's out in the open, coach and coachee can work on moving forward to resolve it.

The journey a coachee makes with their coach can be short and focussed or may continue over a long period. Being clear about what you want to achieve at the outset is essential for both parties to be sure they are heading in the right direction and to know when they've arrived! Setting achievable, yet stretching goals is part of the initial stages of the coaching relationship and a review is usually built in, either after each session, or at least after the first two or three sessions to ensure the coachee is getting what they need. As coachee, if you feel unsure, just ask; your coach will want to provide the best possible service and can work best with you if you are open and up front, sharing any concerns or worries.

Most coaching sessions will involve some sort of follow-up action; this might be to try out something new that you've explored or maybe your coach will ask you to reflect on something that has been central to your discussion. Whatever the action, it is a critical part of your work together. To move forward, we need to put our learning into practice and take some action. Personal reflection as well as sharing with your coach what happened, what's shifted or what emerged for you following some agreed action, is all part of the process.

➤ How can coaching make a difference?

Sometimes people are unsure how coaching can help them; the reality is that once you have engaged with a coach – anything is possible!

Most people have heard of life coaching and how it can be helpful in getting more fulfilment from life, achieve personal goals and generally raise life to a higher level. The same is true of organisational coaching; the bottom line is that coaching in the workplace can help you make the most of what you have to offer – reaching your full potential, in other words, achieving professional and personal growth.

Coaching can help move you forward to achieve a specific goal in your current role, deal with particularly challenging issues and relationships, develop new skills or reinforce learning from more conventional training programmes. It can be very successful in improving confidence and addressing issues of low self esteem for staff at all levels. Many seek coaching when they reach a career crossroads – where do I go next, what shall I do?

Coaching can be useful to help improve performance in particular areas, but it should not be used as a punishment for poor performance; it is essential that the coachee is a willing partner in the coaching relationship or the potential for success is unlikely to be realised. One of the key prerequisites for successful coaching is that the coachee is totally committed to making

change happen, both in the way they do things and often in their attitude, approach and beliefs.

Coaching can be highly effective at all levels in organisations. Many people find coaching particularly helpful when they have recently secured a promotion, as they explore their new role, develop different approaches and forge new relationships. Executive coaching is focussed at the most senior end of the organisation, where the issues worked on are often more complex and strategic in nature.

Reorganisations, mergers and restructures can cause enormous unrest and low morale for teams. Coaching can be a useful intervention to re-focus and help motivate staff through periods of uncertainty when they can otherwise take their eye off the organisational goals. Helping them to see what they have to offer and developing their ability to see themselves in a positive light, can be good news as far as the organisation is concerned, capturing the best its staff have to offer.

Coaching can also reinforce the skills developed on formal training courses, ensuring greater return on investment in staff training. Better employee engagement, improved retention and improvements in performance management are among those benefits noted by organisations where coaching is adopted as a means of supporting staff.

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➤ The evidence

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) 2003 research report, “Understanding the People and Performance Link: Unlocking the black box”, offers an insight into how coaching can help support people development. The evidence shows that coaching contributes to the essentials for optimum performance as a combined function of ability, motivation to engage and an opportunity to deploy ideas and knowledge. Coaching, in short, links the individual with the organisation’s performance in a very deft way that makes sense of the contract between employer and employee for all parties.

There is much evidence around to support the potential benefits of coaching and to promote the use of organisational coaching. During 2007, the (CIPD) published the results of their “Learning and Development

Survey”. They indicate that significant relationships exist between the effective provision of coaching and guidance and the levels of employee satisfaction, commitment and motivation.

Disappointingly, the 2007 CIPD survey also revealed growing indications that the value of coaching hasn’t been fully realised; organisations can gain far more from coaching than they have so far and leadership knowledge risks being lost if individuals are not adequately prepared to coach. The research shows that unless organisations can develop employees who are capable and motivated, with the ability to deal with ambiguity and make effective decisions, they won’t be able to continue to meet customers’ expectations. What greater endorsement is needed for coaching in the workplace?

➤ Who can benefit from coaching?

The short answer is anyone who wants to improve the way they perform their role and who wants to make the most of what they have to offer.

A coach can help people improve their performance, but only if the person wants to improve. Coaching isn’t a sanction and should not be used as such. Coaching only works if the person being coached is prepared to make changes and is ready to

explore how they can make the most of their skills and abilities. To be a good coachee, with the potential to maximise the potential gain from coaching, the individual must be in the right space, prepared to explore challenging personal issues and ready to develop. As Landsberg (2003) explains, “Overall, the coach is aiming for the coachee to help her or himself, and it is a dynamic interaction – it does not rely on a one way flow of telling or instruction”.



➤ Coaching vs mentoring

One of the most frequently asked questions raised by someone seeking coaching is about the similarities and differences between coaching and mentoring. Both are about improving performance and helping people to achieve their full potential. Parsloe and Wray (2000) simply describe the overall purpose of coaching and mentoring as “helping people to become the person they want to be”, which opens up possibilities not only of improvement in the organisational setting, but also of moving towards an individual’s personal fulfilment across all aspects of their lives.

The key differences between coaching and mentoring

MENTORING	COACHING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor is often more senior and comes with specialist professional/ organisational knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach comes with specialist coaching skills applicable in a range of situations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary focus is work/professional person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic focus ie whole person, work plus everything else
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing more flexible relationship can last over long period of time with periods of little/no contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship generally short/ medium term, sometimes timebound; sessions usually structured in nature with regular meetings scheduled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on work based professional issues and career development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on specific goals or areas for improvement, often as much about holistic personal, as professional development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor may offer advice, provide opportunities and introduce mentee to professional networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach seeks answers from within coachee and does not offer advice

(adapted from CIPD January 2008)

Both are about improving performance and helping people to achieve their full potential

The competent mentor will adopt many of the skills and techniques of the experienced coach, most notably asking appropriate questions, listening and challenging. The key difference however, is that the mentor is usually sought because of their particular experience, knowledge or expertise in a specific field. That might be for example, in the same line of work as the person seeking the mentor such as social work, financial management or nursing or because they hold a position to which the potential mentee aspires, e.g. CEO, Medical Director or Senior Civil Servant. The key attraction is that the potential mentor will identify with the mentee's position, understand their field of work and their career aspirations.

The coach on the other hand, is sought because of their recognised coaching expertise and ability to secure results and takes a more holistic, "whole person" approach, often being as interested in what is going on for the coachee outside the work environment as in it. The coach does not offer advice or speak from a place of expert knowledge, but instead seeks the answers from within the coachee. This is one of the key platforms of coaching – the belief that the coachee has all the answers although they may not realise it, and the coach's role is to help them explore and identify the right answers for them. Even in organisational settings where the individual comes to coaching with work-related issues, the coach will usually be exploring the bigger picture for the coachee.

➤ Becoming a coach

When people gain a better understanding of what coaching can offer and how it can work, they are often interested in becoming a coach themselves. There are many approaches to coach training and an equally impressive yet confusing array of coaching schools. To date, the majority of Welsh public service coaches have been trained and qualified through the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM).

Coach training is not limited to the ILM approach. A search of the web will throw up what seems an endless series of coaching schools, approaches, tools and techniques.

In addition to training to become a coach working with people on a 1:1 basis, many are interested in a short course to help develop coaching skills that can be applied to day to day management. By understanding the basics of how to actively listen and ask powerful questions, coupled with some simple techniques, skills can be developed which will enhance the ability of managers and leaders at all levels to better manage their teams. Many development courses now include a module on basic coaching skills for this very reason. Again, if this interests you, the PSMW Coaching Team can provide more information.

➤ Steps to success

If you are interested in taking the idea of coaching forward in your organisation, the following are some practical steps to consider:

- Find out who is already coaching within your organisation. You might be surprised to find you already have a committed and talented resource to call upon
- Talk to your Chair, Director or Senior Manager about the idea of coaching and the potential benefits for your organisation. See what they think and encourage them to explore further
- Engage a coach yourself to identify where you'd like to improve and see the difference it makes in the way you work, think and feel; those around you will notice too!
- Think about how those in your team could benefit from coaching and explore their interest as part of their personal development
- Some basic training – a 2-day key coaching skills workshop will give you the approaches and techniques you need to begin making a positive impact
- Start asking more questions of your team instead of giving them the answers! By managing with a coaching style, you will build their confidence and in due course, free up your time
- Identify 2 or 3 key individuals at different levels in your organisation who would be interested in training as coaches through the PSMW coach training programme
- Finally, talk to the coaching team in PSMW about the Coaching and Mentoring Strategy and how they might support you



➤ PSMW and coaching



PSMW is taking a proactive approach to raising the profile of coaching across the Welsh Public Service. A small coaching team has been established and to find out more about their work and what's planned for the next couple of years, contact psmwcoachingandmentoring@wales.gsi.gov.uk or **029 2068 1289**

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...To live so that which comes to me as seed goes to the next as blossom

That which comes to me as blossom goes on as fruit.

Dawna Markova

Coaching was written by Kay Howells PhD, a professional certified coach, and is one of the series of Sowing Seeds topic papers published by Public Service Management Wales.

The seeds of ideas become the basis on which we grow our knowledge and understanding, in turn, enabling us to develop the organisations in which we work.