



Ghanaian business leaders are embracing executive coaching in a bid to leverage the republic's resources and economic potential

## CHANGE SAFARI

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What better occasion than that of Barack Obama's recent visit to Ghana to reflect on the powerful expansion of coaching here, especially leadership coaching, over the past few years? You may wonder where I see the connection between the two. Let me start by telling you my African coaching tale.

In my childhood I developed a passion and interest in Africa. Later, as my interest developed, I decided to move to Kenya, working for the UN in Nairobi doing fundraising and design and delivery of educational outreach programmes for young Africans about HIV/AIDS and its relation to drug abuse. I realised for the first time the impact coaching can have as an educational and learning approach and the power of its reach beyond boundaries.

I discovered that asking questions, not telling these young people what to do, led to greater results – they found and owned their own answers. I learned the power of teaching how to fish, rather than doing the fishing for others – something I heard in Obama's message to Africa.

In my current role as head of executive coaching in the EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) region of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), I support clients in developing programmes to educate leaders and managers in coaching skills. The aim is to spread this approach systematically through the organisation to create a coaching culture. Using coaching as a leadership tool to promote self-awareness, self-sufficiency, proactive problem-solving and self-confidence among employees, peers and teams, helps increase employee engagement, retention and productivity. Adopting collective coaching behaviour (asking open-ended questions; providing honest and objective feedback; listening to understand and

helping to reflect) and the modelling of that behaviour by leaders encourages adaptability.

Africa is embarking on a collective transformational journey. It's a 'safari of change', helping the continent go beyond its image of poverty, disease and war towards new economic horizons.

A generation of business leaders has emerged that are determined to leverage the continent's resources and potential to create increased business opportunities and development. Coaching as a leadership skill and change enabler may provide a tool to allow for greater scalability of this change.

Last year CCL recruited and trained 20 new African coaches so that our programmes would be rooted in local 'soil'. Recently CCL delivered a three-day coaching programme in Ghana for 28 West African leaders from the banking industry through a successful partnership with leadership development consultancy Optimentus.

We often see Africa as one continent – however the diversity of the cultural, geographical and historical heritage of Africa make a one-size-fits-all leadership development approach inappropriate. To quote from Barack Obama during his recent visit: "We must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans. Conditions must be created where aid is no longer needed. Africa's diversity should be a cause of strength, not a cause for division."

Our first workshop in Accra, Ghana's capital, demonstrated that coaching can lay the foundation for addressing Africa's deep needs. Participants are still writing to tell us how they are applying what they learned with their teams and peers at their workplace and how this skill is helping them be better leaders. ■



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