

THE BESPOKE 360 IS THE MOST HIGHLY VALUED SUPPLEMENTARY SERVICE FOR SENIOR LEVEL EXECUTIVE COACHING

Over recent years Ridler & Co has seen an increasing trend among its CEO, board director and senior executive clients to request a Bespoke 360, usually as an integral part of their coaching assignment, occasionally as a stand-alone exercise supported by coaching.

Chart 8 shows that the most highly value added supplementary service to senior level executive coaching is the Bespoke 360 (69%).

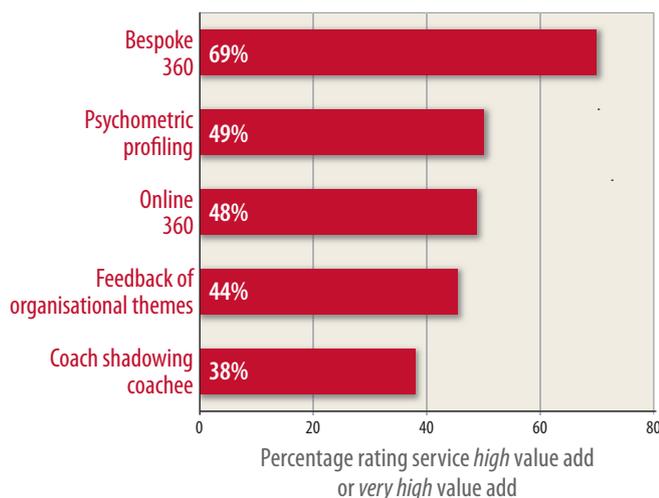


Chart 8. The most highly value added supplementary service to senior level executive coaching is the Bespoke 360.

It is widely accepted that the more senior the leader, the less likely they are to receive accurate feedback from their colleagues and direct reports. When they do actively seek feedback Ridler & Co has found that they value the more in-depth feedback on specific areas of interest that a Bespoke 360 can offer, compared to on-line 360 exercises. On-line 360s typically score from one to five on predetermined questions which may or may not be relevant to the individual senior leader. The small number of open questions in an on-line 360 usually elicit just a few lines of feedback per respondee, which may not be enough to articulate the issues raised in sufficient detail to be really clear.

“The Bespoke 360 process adds considerable value to a coaching assignment because it targets the particular areas the coachee wants to know more about. This can give richer and better informed feedback than an on-line 360 exercise. The clear “diagnosis” of a Bespoke 360 means the coachee can quickly identify issues to work on which will really help them and the organisation.”

Tracey Bray

Talent Manager: Executive Coaching and Development, AEGON UK

Ridler & Co has developed its own proprietary Bespoke 360 process which our clients tell us adds significant value. The process involves carefully tailored questions, asked in thirty minute telephone interviews, with typically a dozen or more interviewees. Telephone interviews offer the chance to focus the questioning on areas of special interest to the coachee. The interviews are written up in a report consisting of high quality verbatim feedback.

Ridler & Co’s clients have found that the in-depth feedback contained in a Bespoke 360 is useful in helping them to understand more clearly the leadership issues they are facing. Such feedback can be especially beneficial in cases when there is resistance by the coachee to taking on board certain challenging messages. Ridler & Co’s clients have sometimes had life-changing messages from their Bespoke 360s (including, occasionally, challenging but invaluable feedback about paths that interviewees believe the client may not be suited to follow). Why do some of Ridler & Co’s clients still carry around with them, and read regularly, the Bespoke 360 reports they commissioned years ago? The interview below gives some insights.

A senior leader’s personal experience of the Bespoke 360

An Executive Committee member in a well-known listed company asked for a Bespoke 360 early on in their coaching assignment. This individual talks below to Clive Mann, Managing Director of Ridler & Co, about the experience.

Clive: How did you come to commission a Bespoke 360 report?

Client: Three to four sessions into my executive coaching, I was intrigued to find out what my colleagues felt was good and bad about my leadership style. I knew I wanted to become a better leader and the Bespoke 360 seemed to offer a way to find out what I needed to work on.

How did the Bespoke 360 help you to do this?

Work colleagues invariably don’t tell you what’s bad about you – nor usually what’s good about you either, for that matter. So there was quite a bit in my 360 report that I simply had not heard about myself before. The Bespoke 360 process is robust and confidentiality is designed into the process, which helped interviewees to say things to my coach which they would not have said to my face, which is exactly what I wanted.

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What were the key features of the Bespoke 360 exercise which added the most value for you?

The 360 report consisted of 100% verbatim feedback. By reading the words in the report I could picture my colleagues saying them to me and I could think OK, is that a fair reaction to how I am? There were no interpretations of the feedback in the 360 report, which was critical. It left me free to develop my own understanding of what the feedback meant, with the support of my coach and one or two carefully selected work colleagues in whom I confided. I liked the detail and quality of feedback in the 360 report which was so much richer than filling in forms in an on-line 360 exercise. In the Bespoke 360 my coach asked each interviewee carefully selected questions, based on the coach’s understanding from our coaching work of what I needed to work on. I think it was helpful that the 360 interviews were by telephone which is anonymous and clinical as a method and really easy administratively, for interviewees.

How did you decide who to include among the 360 interviewees?

Naturally I wanted a mix of my bosses, peers and subordinates. I asked thirteen people in total which I think was about the right number. I made a point of including people who I felt didn't like me, as well as those who did. I asked them all before the interview to be as honest and frank as they could be in discussing my strengths and weaknesses. I included as an interviewee one person I did not work with who had known me for a long time in a personal capacity. This was helpful because I could then compare my non-work psyche against the work environment. I also included a boss from a previous company which helped me to understand if my impact in my current organisation was different compared to previous organisations.

What particularly interested you about the feedback you received?

I was very interested in the feelings I evoked from my colleagues, both peers and reports, through our day-to-day interactions and how this impacted on our working relationships. The 360 feedback helped me to understand much better the impact of my management style on my direct reports.

Were there any surprises?

The bits that surprised me most were the good bits – I thought wow, unbelievable, do you really think that?

What was the most useful aspect of the 360 feedback?

One of my colleagues offered me in the report a great metaphor which really crystallised my understanding of the way my personality can change under pressure and it helped me to manage this aspect of my personality in a much more conscious and active way. A couple of years on, I still find it helpful to read my 360 report and reflect on the feedback, often with a smile on my face. In the end it was a valuable and strangely pleasurable experience.

Did the Bespoke 360 exercise help you to be more effective in your role?

By commissioning the 360 exercise I think I demonstrated to everyone

"The Bespoke 360 was a valuable and strangely pleasurable experience."

that I was absolutely willing to be criticised and people respected me for that. I used the feedback to make some small but significant changes in the way I managed a number of work relationships.

How did your colleagues feel about being asked to give you feedback?

Everyone was fine about it. My team appreciated that they had a boss who was trying to listen, trying to get better. At least one of my bosses respected highly the fact that I was brave enough to ask for feedback and was impressed with my seriousness in wanting to become a better leader.

What support did you need to make sense of the 360 feedback?

My coach helped me to work out which of the feedback was accurate and important to work on and which was just "noise", to do with other people's agendas. My coach was also very good at smoothing down my initial reaction to the more negative aspects of the feedback and slowed me down to help me understand the significance of the negatives while making sure I wasn't crushed by them, reminding me of the positives at the same time. That was essential. I also sat down with a close colleague, one of the 360 interviewees, whom I really trusted and we went through the 360 report together. Their first-hand understanding of what was going on in the organisation complemented my coach's external perspective, helping me to sift through the feedback to focus on what was most important to work on.

Were there any things about the Bespoke 360 process which you found frustrating?

I did try to guess who made each comment in the 360 report but my coach wouldn't tell me! Seriously, the careful management of confidentiality was crucial to give me trust in the process. It was vital that I was the only one with authority to read the report and decide who, if anyone, to share it with. The report had the potential to be quite a controversial document if it had been misused but my organisation was, quite rightly, not given access to the report without my say so, even though they paid for it.

How did you feel the Bespoke 360 worked as a part of your coaching assignment?

I don't actually know how you could have an executive coaching assignment without a Bespoke 360. If the point of a coaching assignment is to become a better leader you need to know what you need to fix, don't you? How can you do that without getting honest feedback from people who work with you? I think the coaching support was central to the 360 exercise as I was able to interpret the feedback in the right way and make a balanced decision about how to act on it.

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What was the biggest benefit you yourself got from the Bespoke 360?

The biggest benefit was that it helped me to understand my working persona and how it filtered out to lots of different people in lots of different ways. It also made me much more aware of the way I talk to people and the way I do things. That helped me to make changes for the better. You can't go through your life managing working relationships, or any relationship for that matter, without stopping at some point and listening to what people are saying to you. If you don't stop and listen you won't progress.

Do you think it was necessary to go to the expense of an externally generated Bespoke 360?

I think it's absolutely essential that the 360 exercise is carried out by an external consultant because companies can have internal agendas and I would not have been totally comfortable if the exercise had been carried out internally. In fact I would have said I'm just not going to do it. A 360 process should not be done clumsily or lightly or the recipient could come spinning off the track because of the negative feedback. I think there is a big value add in all the time my coach spent with me before the 360 was carried out, which enabled the coach to tailor the questions and probe into interesting areas. Without the expert questioning and listening by my coach I don't think the feedback would have been nearly as rich.

Do you think your company got value for money from the Bespoke 360 exercise?

I think getting the quantity and quality of 360 feedback delivered through my coach within the context of a professional coaching relationship has definitely made me a better business person and a better leader. That must benefit the company in the end. The cost of the work should always be a consideration but as a proportion of my remuneration and the value I was responsible for creating for my company it was tiny, so I definitely think it represented value for money for the company.

Many thanks for your time and your very interesting observations.