

Coaching at Work



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The Two Davids: meet the
pioneers of the profession





Dynamic duo: David Clutterbuck (left) and David Megginson

In two MINDS

The two Davids – Clutterbuck and Megginson – are a powerful double act on the coaching and mentoring circuit. And they've had some of their best ideas halfway up a mountain. **Liz Hall** discovers a highly professional, yet very human working relationship

Mention mentoring to a bunch of coaches, HR and L&D

professionals and chances are David Clutterbuck's name will come up. Clutterbuck (pictured, far left, facing page) has been credited with introducing supported mentoring to the UK in the 1980s and, more recently, to many other parts of the world. His co-authored book *Everyone Needs a Mentor*¹ has been a mentoring bible for 20 years.

Aside from being one of the world's experts on mentoring, Clutterbuck is also the other half of the "Two Davids", as he and David Megginson (pictured right, facing page) are affectionately known on the conference circuit.

The pair have known each other for 20 years. Megginson recalls that early on, "David said he was thinking of inventing something called the European Mentoring Centre (EMC). I asked him what that would look like and he said he didn't know."

This is quite typical of Clutterbuck, apparently: "He produces 20 new ideas a day and 19 of them are absolute rubbish. But there is also one great one. He's my role

model for ideational fluency," says Megginson.

The EMC was not one of the "rubbish" ideas. By 1992, the Two Davids had set up the EMC. Its first conference at Sheffield Hallam University attracted 50 delegates and last December the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) – the body it became – celebrated its fifteenth conference.

There are now local EMCCs in 18 countries and the EMCC is a key player in the development of standards for the profession.

Open church

Clutterbuck notes: "One of the things we were passionate about when we set up the EMC was that it should be open church. We'd seen all these wedges and we saw opportunities being lost to learn from each other. This isn't to say we're relaxed about it not having

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MEGGINSON

charlatans – we wanted to develop high competence and effectiveness but we wanted it to be widely open to lots of perspectives because coaching and mentoring is about opening up people.”

The Two Davids collaborated on their first book, *Mentoring in Action* (Kogan Page, 1995). They have gone on to co-author a number of books, while both have written many separately too – 45 in Clutterbuck's case.

They first got together in 1988 after Megginson was approached by Jenny Sweeney of the former Industrial Society to close a one-day conference for which Clutterbuck had been commissioned to carry out research. Sweeney had seen an article by Megginson in the journal *Management Education and Development* on management approaches to helping.

"David was taking notes all the time and I told him he was the only person I knew who took more notes than me. He said he was writing a book," said Megginson.

Clutterbuck is known for his ability to multi-task. Many coaches will be familiar with the sound of him clickety-clacking on his laptop keyboard during a presentation. They soon started collaborating professionally. ▶



Climb every mountain

But it hasn't all been hard work – they also share a love of mountain hiking. They chuckle about a time they walked near Everest with fellow coach Tom Richardson. Clutterbuck had been kept awake all night by a stray dog. When he shared how tired he was, Richardson said: "But how would you like to feel later on today?"

Some of the Two Davids' best ideas have come during such hikes. One is the "Extremes" coaching technique. Clutterbuck had been feeling everyone was telling him to be less trusting. He was having sleepless nights after being treated unfairly in a professional dealing. While out walking, the pair tried out the technique of: "Where are you now and where do you think you ought to be?"

In this case, it was "suspicious bastard" versus "trusting fool". They looked at where Clutterbuck's

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CLUTTERBUCK”

intuition told him he should be. In fact, it was close to where he was. He had no more sleepless nights.

Clutterbuck says of Megginson: "David pricks my bubble with a wry smile and eyebrows lifted – but after the dissecting of an idea, it's: 'Let's work this through, let's look at possibilities.'"

"He's incredibly reflexive," Clutterbuck continues. "There is a

man of steel inside the man of steel. He has incredible gentleness but it masks an ability to see through the crap – he has even more intolerance for crap than I do."

Bloody difficult questions

Megginson says Clutterbuck is the best of the two at crystallising and operationalising ideas.

Clutterbuck first came to mentoring while the editor of *International Management*. He had stumbled across some research into informal mentoring by academic Kathy Kram.

"I got hooked by the power to help people develop and achieve their potential and the power of dialogue – these themes have dominated my life for the past 30 years," reveals Clutterbuck.

In 1983, he left journalism to set up his own company, Item, an employee communication business. The same year, he wrote his first book, *The Winning Streak*, with the then director-general of the Institute of Directors, Walter Goldsmith.

Through his work with others, including Megginson, Sweeney, Bob Garvey and Julie Hay, he concluded that US-style sponsorship mentoring didn't quite translate to the UK because of a growing focus on getting people to take responsibility. By the 1990s, he had played a key role in shifting mentoring in Britain towards a non-directive style.

For Clutterbuck, in his work and writing, it's about asking what he calls BDQs (bloody difficult questions) – he has a "passion for effective conversation". Meanwhile Megginson highlights his "unfailing positivity".

"He has a clear energy which is amazingly productive. He's incredibly principled and very grounded in business. He is hugely generous with his time with charity work."

Clutterbuck has an "insatiable desire to learn". One of the ways he learns is through charity work, particularly with children with learning and social disabilities. His

son, Jonathan, now aged 22, is autistic and has Down Syndrome. "Teaching Jonathan to do things is fascinating because all the cognitive processes are slowed down. If you say something like, 'Chuck your dishes in the sink', he will do just that."

With his wife, Clutterbuck set up the charity SHARE, for children with learning and social disabilities. He runs socialising programmes for young adults with Asperger Syndrome and set up SPICE (Special People on Ice), an ice-skating club for children with disabilities.

Inner conversations

His work is driven partly by a desire to "help society become more comfortable with the whole area of disability and being different". He says there is a crossover with the work he does with organisations such as police forces on diversity dialogue.

"It's about having inner conversations with yourself and managing the conversation with the other person – there are always the two conversations."

Back in the late 1960s, Megginson's route into coaching and mentoring came through an involvement with T-groups (in which learners use here-and-now experience in a group setting), followed by adult learning and the concept of individuals taking responsibility. He noticed that one of the best practices for learning was one-to-one conversations. He became one of the earliest contributors to the literature on coaching², drawing on Chris Argyris' work on organisational behaviour. Megginson and Tom Boydell recognised the conflict between the need for the manager to control staff and to support and develop them.

For Megginson, a strong theme is the integration of wholeness. Clients often say that how they are at home differs from how they are at work. He guesses that many are probably not as different as they think they are.

He is of the same school as Erik de Haan when it comes to the role of techniques in coaching.

"It's about presence, relationships and stillness. If you achieve that, then people have the potential for tremendous growth."

Being able to work with silence is key. As a Quaker, he spends an hour every Sunday in silence. "Be sure that what you say adds to the silence," he says.

Clutterbuck agrees: "David brings an incredible calmness to things. I don't know anyone else who can come into a room like he does and bring the temperature down. Some of my most enjoyable times with him have been enjoying the silence on mountains."

“I'm only just getting going – I hit 65 last summer and have just developed a 15-year plan

MEGGINSON”

"It's important for coaches to be self-effacing, otherwise they get in the way. When I started out, I didn't know what to do next for 70 per cent of the time, now it's 90 per cent. What worries me is the 10 per cent when I think I know. It's about having a signature in invisible ink."

Clutterbuck counts his influences as Peter Drucker; Peter Hawkins; David Burnham's ideas on leadership; and Stafford Beer's theories on systems which helped increase Clutterbuck's "awareness of how people, organisations and societies are linked together, and how nobody can consider themselves in isolation".

Meanwhile, Megginson also cites Boydell and Mike Pedler as people who have taught him a great deal. He enjoys his regular work with Daniel Doherty and colleagues from Bristol University's Critical Coaching Research Unit. Other

influences have been his colleagues at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) such as Paul Stokes. Until 2003, Megginson was the full-time professor of HRD at SHU, when he left to set up research consultancy MCRG. He is now visiting professor, as is Clutterbuck (since 2000).

Legacy of learning

Clutterbuck aims to spend more time in academia, helping to integrate good practice from the different schools and disciplines.

He has a boss for the first time in 25 years, having just sold international mentoring support provider Clutterbuck Associates to General Physics.

He is also dedicating time to leaving a legacy of learning, downloading learning into manuals and encyclopaedias.

"For a long time, I've had the perception that coaching and mentoring are the replacement for what the community used to provide. My vision is for coaching and mentoring to be automatically available... with professionals doing it at the top, all the way down to the seven-year-old kid. This puts obligations on master coaches to make sure they develop competence in everyone."

Megginson, meanwhile, describes himself as a late developer. "I'm only just getting going – I hit 65 last summer and have just developed a 15-year plan. It's going to involve much more understanding of experiences through poetry and more training on spirit as part of coach development. I think we have a connection with destiny – how do we find it and what do we do about it. The answer will be different for different people." ■

References

- 1 D Clutterbuck, *Everyone Needs a Mentor: Fostering Talent in Your Organisation*, CIPD: London, 2004.
- 2 D Megginson and T Boydell, *A Manager's Guide to Coaching*, CIPD: London, 1979.