

Who I am

Piers Fallowfield-Cooper

Business coach and mentor

I am moderately dyslexic, but very intuitive, which bodes well for a job in coaching. At an early age I had to become a systemic thinker – being offered information or a situation, and having to work out the missing pieces. But even today, the simplest things catch me out. As a youngster, it meant I was filling in the missing pieces to scenarios without realising I was doing so, but today it means I approach situations and conflicts from a different direction to many other people. That's handy when you enter an organisation for the first time.

The work I do will always be necessary. Not many people have the opportunity to have a conversation with, or get feedback from, someone working at a senior level who has no previous vested interest in you. The advantage of being an external party is that I can be honest. Some people may not like what I have to say, but I'm not afraid of getting fired.

Volkswagen has a big job on its hands to rebuild trust with its employees and the public. Authenticity is vital, and while people are sometimes willing to put up with significant flaws in a leader, they are not willing to put up with someone who is fake.

There is a great subtlety to what I do. Sometimes I know exactly what needs to be done, but I must wait for clients to discover it for themselves. That is the art of coaching. When I am facilitating boards, a sign I'm doing a good job is that, at the end of it, people are asking: 'Why do we have that guy along with us?' I always prefer at the end of a journey to be standing in the wings, applauding the leader as they take their bow. If you want to stand on the stage with the leader, you're in the wrong business.

The best part of my job is being able to see inside different businesses. Six weeks ago I was wearing a hard hat in a sugar mill in South Africa. I now know more about sugar production than I ever thought I would, and it's fascinating. You can learn so much about the inner workings of different organisations just by spending time with their people.

CV

Piers Fallowfield-Cooper began his career in the financial markets of the City of London. He spent three years as chief executive of mobile payment solutions company Itsmobile, and became CEO of Greycon in 2003. He is now a full-time business coach and mentor.