

Executive Coaching Is Hot!

Driving the trend for executive coaching is the business reality that good people are hard to find and harder to keep. With a constant need to stay competitive, companies are seeing coaching as a way to help valued employees develop swiftly in a rapidly changing business environment.

A growing number of Fortune 500 companies offer executive coaching to their top people. Whether hiring external coaches or training their own leaders in coaching skills, companies are finding that coaching is essential for creating change and evolving people towards their highest productivity and potential.

The Executive Summit of the International Coach Federation defines executive coaching as a facilitative one-to-one mutually designed relationship between a professional coach and a key contributor who has a powerful position in the organization. The focus of the coaching is usually upon organizational performance or development, but may have a personal component as well.

Why Executive Coaching?

Executive coaching can be very useful in helping executives carry what they learn in leadership development programs back to the workplace and applying those lessons into practice. One study examined the effects of executive coaching in a public sector municipal agency. Thirty-one managers underwent a conventional managerial training program, which was followed by 8 weeks of one-on-one coaching. Training increased productivity by 22.4%. The coaching, which included goal setting, collaborative problem solving, practice, feedback, supervisory involvement, evaluation of end results, and a public presentation, increased productivity by 88%, a significantly greater gain compared to training alone (Olivero, Bane, & Kopeiman 1997). If the observations from this study bear out, it means that executive coaching coupled with management and leadership training can boost productivity and help build leadership competencies.

The objectivity that an executive coach brings to a developmental opportunity is helpful to managers seeking to make difficult changes in attitudes, work habits, perspectives and interpersonal relationships.

There seems to be little question that coaching is a valid method of producing desired change with leaders. Companies that have employed coaches will agree that, overall, there are performance improvements, as well as improved well-being among participants.

About 6 out of 10 organizations currently offer coaching or other developmental

counseling to their managers and executives according to a survey by Manchester, Inc., a Jacksonville, Florida, career management consulting firm. Another 20% of companies said they plan to offer such coaching within the next year.

One study shows that the top reasons for offering coaching include:

1. Sharpening the leadership skills of high-potential individuals (86%)
2. Correcting management behavior problems such as poor communication skills, failure to develop subordinates, or indecisiveness (72%)
3. Ensuring the success or decreasing the failure rate, of newly promoted managers (64%)
4. Correcting employee relations problems such as poor interpersonal skills, disorganization, demeaning or arrogant behavior (59%)
5. Providing the required management and leadership skills to technically oriented employees (58%).

The Masterful Coaching Experience

What makes a masterful coaching experience, one that provides long-lasting and magnificent results? On the face, coaching sounds like simple goal setting with accountability and motivational pep talks thrown in. The athletic coach comes to mind, transformed into a business-like version. Even Ken Blanchard co-authored a book with Don Shula, *Everyone's A Coach*. But the truth is, not everybody is a masterful coach.

The work of truly effective coaching within organizations involves much more than goal-setting. It involves unleashing the human spirit and expanding people's capacity to achieve stretch goals and bring about real change. This does not start with techniques like setting goals, motivating people and giving feedback. It starts with considering and altering the underlying context in which these occur.

The underlying context is all of the conclusions, beliefs and assumptions people in the organization have reached in order to succeed. This context is shaped by the shared interpretations people make about their business environment. And it also includes the management culture that is inherited or self-imposed. This basic cultural context must be considered in creating a framework for effective coaching.

In today's rapidly changing business environment, winning organizations need a new kind of management culture, one that is based on creating new knowledge. This requires constant learning. A crucial catalyst in this new management culture is the coach. His or her job is to provide direction while leaving plenty of room for people to pursue their passions, personal interests and projects.

Xerox's Paul Allaire says, "The key to the new productivity is people – helping them do what they can do, what they want to do, what they inherently know is the right thing to do."

In its simplest terms, masterful coaching involves expanding people's capacity to take effective action. It involves challenging underlying beliefs and assumptions that

are responsible for one's actions and behaviors. At its deepest level, masterful coaching examines not only what one does, and why one does what one does, but also *who* one is.

Using Assessments with Coaching

Many coaches begin the coaching process with assessments. Some coaching involves extensive feedback from 360 degree surveys in which the person being coached receives input from peers, subordinates and superiors.

Initially there may be extensive work examining and formulating one's personal values, interests and creating a personal mission statement. This is similar to a business strategy and mission statement for the organization. There may be coaching around aligning the personal purpose and objectives with those of the organization.

The astute coach will help the person examine gaps or openings between what they believe they do and what they actually do. This is fertile ground for personal growth and development, but is also the area where people can become defensive and resistant. It takes a talented coach to help someone out of these stuck areas, or blind spots – where they do not see with clarity. This is where the effective coach uses finely-tuned listening and observing skills.

Goals and Outcomes

What are the goals and outcomes of effective executive coaching? Traditionally, the goals have been fairly specific and have focused on preventing executive derailment. The coaching process may address a specific behavior that is causing managerial conflict, improve specific managerial competencies, solve specific problems, or help executives address behaviors or issues that are impeding job effectiveness.

Increasingly, coaching seeks to enhance the performance of high-potential executives. The goals of executive coaching are shifting and broadening as more and more executives seek out coaching for a variety of different reasons.

Here are some other important results cited in research on the outcomes of executive coaching:

1. Better management by enhancing an executive's ability to navigate sensitive political issues
2. Strengthening strategic decision-making
3. Opening a window onto organizational and self explorations

Research by the Center for Creative Leadership has found that the primary causes of derailment in executives involve deficits in emotional competence.

These are listed as:

1. Difficulty handling change
2. Not being able to work well in a team

3. Poor interpersonal relations

A study of 130 executives found that how well people handled their own emotions determined how much people around them preferred to deal with them.

It is becoming obvious that coaching is not only about behavioral changes leading to improved performance on the job. The masterful coaching experience goes deeper than behavior changes into real and lasting changes.

Coaching is effective when it leads to behavioral change, particularly when it affects the bottom line. However, for change to be lasting and meaningful, the coach must reach for deeper levels of commitment and explore core issues with the client.

David Whyte puts it eloquently: *“It is incumbent on each of us, to start telling our story in such a way that you can grant magnificence back to your work and back to what you do. If you can’t grant magnificence to your work, you grant magnificence to yourself and have the courage to step out of it into something that is really commensurate to your gifts and is a place where you can really feel like you come alive again at the frontier of your own destiny”* (1999).

How to Get the Most Out of Coaching

- 1. Talk about what matters most.** Be selfish about your coaching time – talk about what really matters rather than what you “should” be addressing.
- 2. Focus on how you feel, not just on what you produce.** Don’t avoid talking about feelings, no matter what your opinions of them are. Feelings drive behaviors. To change your behaviors, change how you feel. Awareness is the first step toward change.
- 3. Get more space, not more time, into your life.** Coaching needs room in order to work. If you’re too busy, you’ll use coaching to push yourself harder, instead of using coaching to become more effective. Simplification gets you space.
- 4. Become incredibly selfish.** Coaching will help you to identify and reduce things that drain you such as recurring problems, difficult relationships and pressured environments.
- 5. Be open to see things differently.** You will get more out of coaching if you are willing to examine your assumptions, ways of thinking, expectations, beliefs, and reactions. As David Whyte has said, “Nobody has to change, but everybody has to have the conversation.”
- 6. Sensitize yourself to see and experience things earlier.** Coaching conversations will lead you to increased awareness. The more you sensitize yourself to your feelings and thoughts, the faster you can respond to events and opportunities. This may mean eliminating alcohol, stress, caffeine and an adrenaline-based energy system for living.

7. Strengthen your business and personal environments. Design the perfect environment in which to live and work. If your surroundings are unpleasant, unhealthy, or disorganized, they can affect your success. Clean up, organize, beautify.

8. Be clear about your goals before ending the coaching session. Coaching is just conversation unless it leads to action. Make sure you know what your goals are, both immediate, near future and long term.

9. Improve your ability to give feedback. Successful leaders know how to give feedback to their key people. They do it frequently and with authenticity. Give your coach feedback, especially at the end of each session. Say what worked, what didn't, and what you'd like next.

10. Be willing to evolve yourself, not just increase your performance. Coaching is a developmental process and an evolutionary one. You'll learn how to accomplish more with less effort. But you will also learn to think differently, change outdated beliefs and assumptions and expand your view of yourself and your place in the world. Work with your coach to become more magnificent in your work and in your life.

Key Coaching Principles

1. Synergy causes better results, much more easily. Proper coach/client matching is essential for synergy to occur.

2. When people are fully heard, they move forward immediately. Not being heard slows down personal development and human evolution.

3. Any situation can be optimized, turned around or improved. And if it cannot, get out of it responsibly.

4. Fewer problems occur when one has a strong personal foundation. Rising above the muck of life is step one in coaching.

5. Sometimes the client has the answer, sometimes the coach does. It doesn't really matter where it comes from.

6. One *can* have a perfect life. It's not a fantasy or pipedream. It really is do-able, and in this lifetime.

7. Humans operate at one percent or less of our potential. Coaching increases this figure.

8. Success is a basic human right. Success has nothing to do with deservingness, privilege or background.

9. When the client properly defines success, coaching becomes easy. And clients know

better how to use their coach.

10. Most people don't really know what they truly want. A coach can help clients discover what that is. It's usually simple.

11. What one puts up with costs one dearly. Tolerations waste one's spirit, one's heart, one's mind, and one's pocketbook.

12. We are all Picassos-In-Training. The world is waiting for people to discover, express and share their creativity.

– Thomas Leonard

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