

Coaching Leaders - A guide to Executive Coaching

Executive coaching: From the outside looking in

Where do senior managers, regional heads, SME owners and other business leaders go when they want help thinking 'outside the box', a different perspective or the chance to talk through and tackle some business issues that they just feel 'stuck' about? Well, increasingly, they turn to an executive coach.

The concept of executive coaching is to help all of those newly appointed or highly experienced CEO's, Managing Directors and senior-level staff who don't have anyone 'higher up' to seek advice from. A coach not only provides guidance and support to top company executives, but they also bring an outside, objective perspective to the situation with no vested interest or bias around the outcome. So whether you're part of a team at a small business, medium-sized company or a large multi-national corporation, an executive coach may be able to help you to help your company.

You may be up to your eyes in work and feeling as if you don't have time to take on anything (or any one) new. And you might also be wondering whether or not you even need an Executive Coach.

But, the question shouldn't be 'if' you need an executive coach so much as how much you could benefit from one, which is what this Blue Paper explains. It is structured into two main parts, profiles of the coach and the coached: Who they are. What they do. Why you might need one. For added value, it also incorporates the advice of some esteemed experts - namely, executive coaches from around the world. Their thoughts and ideas are referenced throughout and seek to inspire in you - as a team member, manager or top-level CEO - in your desire to push your professional skills up a notch and benefit from some real-time lifelong learning.

The coach: A profile

Who are executive coaches and what credentials should they have? Well, executive coaches are often business high flyers who have already been through the gamut of business life, either as an owner/manager of a large business. They have, or can access, experience and expertise in strategy and development, structure and organisation, communication and conflict, transition and success planning - just to mention a few. Sometimes you'll find that they specialise within a specific industry or skillset, but that's not always the case. 'Industry expert' isn't usually one of their credentials because their main job is to help others to identify ways to strengthen their own leadership skills, often through positive behaviour



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and more effective methods of communication.

Executive coaches tend to have plenty of business relevant experience and a strong sense of purpose to back it up. A quality executive coach often holds an MBA or degree in business management, marketing or HR as well as coaching qualifications which are complemented by years of practical experience, especially with situations common to senior-level staff. They are also skilled individuals at applying and understanding analytical tools.

The Association for Coaching offer several definitions for Executive Coaching including "Executive Coaching is specifically focused at senior management level where there is an expectation for the coach to feel as comfortable exploring business related topics, as personal development topics with the client in order to improve their personal performance"¹

The foundational basis of the relationship between executive coaches and the executives they coach is trust. In a survey of former coaches by the Alexcel Group, two-thirds noted that "their engagements involved being a trusted advisor able to provide much needed objectivity."² That said, even though executive coaches are respected practitioners, they are first and foremost trusted advisors with the "knowledge, confidence, and authority to offer the outside perspective ..."³

What do executive coaches do?

Like you, executive coaches solve problems. By nature, coaches tend to be creative and innovative thinkers. Add to that a wealth of experience to draw from and you've got just the right mix for someone who is not only able to help you to improve personal performance, but to help you improve in areas that you didn't even know you needed to.



Think of an executive coach as a voice of reason amidst the chaos. As a business leader in the thick of project management, deadlines, internal reviews and budgets day in and day out, it's hard for you to also see clearly how you might improve your methods. Being inside the 'my business' box for so long can sometimes skew your vision, so that outside the box insight is where an executive coach can really help: Coaches provide that outside, objective perspective into the box that is your company.

You may be used to reviewing reports for indications of a problem when, really,

¹ "Coaching defined" Association for Coaching <<http://www.associationforcoaching.com/pages/about/coaching-defined>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

² "Why You Need A Leadership Coach" <<http://www.inc.com/john-baldoni/why-you-need-an-executive-coach.html>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

³ John Baldoni. "Why You Need A Leadership Coach" <<http://www.inc.com/john-baldoni/why-you-need-an-executive-coach.html>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

the problem is something that numbers and analysis can't capture. Coaches can help you to find the glitch in the report, but they'll usually ignore the numbers completely. In fact, they do their job by listening to you and learning about how you manage your team and your company. They take a long hard look at how you operate as an individual and then, based on your needs, help you to make changes by:⁴

- Refining your leadership style
- Reorganising your priorities
- Leading teams effectively
- Clarifying expectations
- Developing relationships
- Simplifying communication

*Most of us know what we don't do well. What we don't know is how to fix it. What coaches do well is help you fix it by identifying what behaviours are not working for you.*⁵

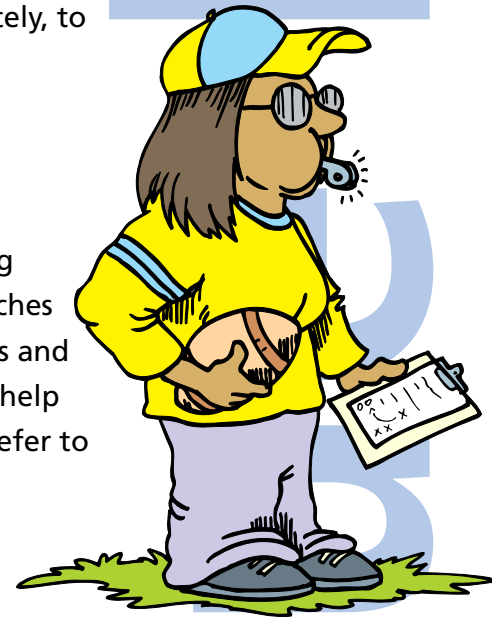
Margot Feldman.

In the end, you will have more skills to manage your team, especially in a time of crisis like an organisational restructure, and you may even see an increase in team performance, too. Often, the lines of communication are not as open as they could be and executive coaches are experts at spotting ways to help you communicate more clearly with your team. Their role is to 'challenge, stretch and develop the critical thinking and leadership ability of the CEO'⁶ and ultimately, to help you to grow both as a person and as a professional.

How do executive coaches ... coach?

You won't find executive coaches on the 'sidelines' at an important meeting shouting instructions or tips like you see at a football match. Executive coaches are more personal, more private. They are experts at asking great questions and highly skilled listeners and during this questions and listening process they help you to identify the best way forward. Some of them, an estimated 30%, prefer to follow an established method or model.⁷

That's right. There are different models that a coach can use when coaching executives.



⁴ Roy J Blitzer. "Can Coaching Help Your Business?" *Entrepreneur.com*, 11 Feb. 2009. <<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/20032>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013

⁵ Carleton College <http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/ascl/academic_skills_consulting/>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

⁶ N2Growth. "Infographic: The Benefits Of A CEO Coach." *CEO.com*, 15 Oct. 2012. <http://www.ceo.com/leadership_and_management/infographic-the-benefits-of-a-ceo-coach/>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

⁷ Infographic "Executive Coaching Processes." *Visual.ly* <<http://visual.ly/executive-coaching-processes>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

Co-active coaching

According to The Coaches Training Institute⁸ (CTI), which has around 20 regional groups of Co-active coaches in the UK, the co-active coaching model is founded on the importance of relationship intelligence and how it relates to success. It involves self-awareness, relational ability and courageous action. In this coaching model, coaches listen closely to expose and empower the skills a client already has.⁹

Karen and Henry Kimsey-House and Laura Whitworth combined forces to author Co-Active Coaching¹⁰. They see the co-active coaching model as an “alliance between two equals [client and coach] for the purpose of meeting the client’s needs.” It is built on the following ideas:

- The client is already whole
- They are naturally creative and resourceful
- Co-active coaching should address the client’s whole life
- Agenda items stem from the client

From the executive coach’s perspective, ‘nothing is wrong or broken, there is no need to fix the client - the coach does not have the answers; the coach has questions.’

One-on-one interaction with an objective third party can provide a focus that other forms of organisational support simply cannot.¹¹

Paul Michelman, Harvard Business Review

GROW

Originally established in the 1980s by performance coach Sir John Whitmore GROW¹² is an acronym for:

- G**oals
- R**eality (currently)
- O**bstacles (or Options)
- W**ay forward (or Will)

The coach, who is usually not an expert in the client’s industry or role, explores

⁸ The Coaches Training Institute <<http://www.thecoaches.com/>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

⁹ “What Is Co-Active?” The Coaches Training Institute. <<http://www.thecoaches.com/why-cti/what-is-co-active/>>. The Coaches Training Institute

¹⁰ Co-Active Coaching <<http://www.thecoaches.com/why-cti/buy-the-book/>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

¹¹ “What an Executive Coach Can Do for You.” <<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/4853.html>>. Harvard Business School. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

¹² The GROW Model. <http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_89.htm>. Mind Tools. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.



with them the 4-step process above, using a series of probing questions to enable the person to identify the current issue and their desired outcome. Whilst the process itself is relatively simple, it's important to dig deep and continue to question and discuss each of the stages to achieve the best results.

Of course not all coaches follow just one approach and many excellent leaders in their field adapt their coaching material to suit their client's needs. Julie Kay, owner/founder of JKLD based in York explains: "I'm not wedded to any particular approach or school of thinking, being aware that if you only have a hammer in your toolbox everything starts to look like a nail."¹³

"My model is based on high challenge high support," she continues. "It considers the organisational context, and alignment between individual, coaching sponsor, and organisational objectives. It doesn't rely solely on the coachee's self-evaluation, as this isn't always the most accurate assessment and can lead to a lack of opportunity for the coach to challenge. We start with 360° feedback which explores the expectations and impact of any actions on other stakeholders including family, colleagues, customers and shareholders. It also enables the practice of challenging conversations within the coaching session before taking it to the real context."¹⁴

The coached: A profile

In case you're wondering just how prevalent executive coaches are, don't worry ... they're very common.

Business leaders from Meg Whitman at HP, Microsoft's Bill Gates and Google's Larry Page have all at one time or another worked with an executive coach. Perhaps a better question would be who *hasn't* had one?¹⁵ Countless CEOs have called upon the services of an executive coach and their success, like those listed above, certainly point favourably to the value of executive coaching.

It's worth pointing out too that the concept of coaching is not solely meant for executives. If you spot a particularly talented team member who would make a great manager someday, let them know that they could benefit from spending a little time with an executive coach. Bear in mind that suggesting a 'coach' may be perceived as negative, so keep these tips in mind to avoid any misunderstandings:



¹³ JK Leadership Development. <<http://www.jkld.co.uk/images/About%20Julie.pdf>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

¹⁴ 4imprint Interview with Julie Kay from JK Leadership Development. 30 Aug 2013.

¹⁵ N2Growth. "Infographic: The Benefits Of A CEO Coach." CEO.com. 15 Oct. 2012. Web. 22 Sept. 2013. <http://www.ceo.com/leadership_and_management/infographic-the-benefits-of-a-ceo-coach/>.

- Schedule a meeting to discuss the option in person and at length
- Be as transparent as possible
- Then, explain that you see a well of untapped leadership potential, something an executive coach would be well-suited to find and exploit

As businesses grow, so does the competition. Pressure to perform well is then compounded by any number of internal and external issues or problems. When the going gets tough, the tough get an executive coach.

*Good coaches I know do not pull punches with the feedback they deliver. They seek to be honest brokers with ideas, opinions, and suggestions they gather from stakeholders. Coaches also listen and learn from what an executive says, and seek to share expertise in helpful ways, especially to challenge assumptions.*¹⁶

John Baldoni.

What are some of the benefits of working with an executive coach?

In a survey of like-minded executives by professional services giant PriceWaterhouseCoopers, coaching clients reported an average return on investment (ROI) of seven times their initial investment.¹⁷ A quarter of respondents, however, reported ROIs of 10 to 49 times their initial investment.¹⁸



But there's more to coaching than the ROI they can help you achieve.

Consider this scenario: You are a newly recruited, talented manager at a semi-successful medium sized company operating internationally. Over the years, the organisation has suffered from the effects of the recession, but it's bouncing back steadily. The board of directors recruited you and your talent to take the firm to the next level. The problem is ... you don't know the board very well. And, you're counting on them to help you better understand the company's direction.

Sounds like the perfect opportunity to hire an executive coach. You find one to help you better understand the board of directors and, from the very start, your

¹⁶ John Baldoni. "Why You Need A Leadership Coach" <<http://www.inc.com/john-baldoni/why-you-need-an-executive-coach.html>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

¹⁷ Matt Symonds. "Executive Coaching - Another Set of Clothes for the Emperor?" *Forbes Magazine*, 21 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/mattsymonds/2011/01/21/executive-coaching-another-set-of-clothes-for-the-emperor/>> Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

newly appointed coach helps you to foster solid relationships. Between you, your coach and the board, you work together to identify areas of improvement and work towards verifiable changes over the course of your interaction. More specifically, executive coaches will:

- Assist you in adaptive personal communication skills like getting to know board members as individuals. There are big steps, like finding out what their 'agenda' is, as well as smaller steps, like determining how they prefer to be contacted
- Suggest streamlining your methods of communication so that you're able to tell the board what you envisage for the company and more clearly comprehend their vision too
- Offer relational advice. As an example, an executive coach may suggest to their client not to ask board members about their colleagues and recommend that they let board members come to them with personal concerns and questions
- Act as a facilitator between you and the board in an effort to drive collaboration

The idea is not to highlight what faults and weaknesses you have, but rather to identify your strengths and build upon them. Coaches use their experience and expertise to introduce long-lasting behaviour-based changes that will improve your individual and your team's performance, as it relates to your business. Working with an executive coach is a developmental experience, one that will equip you with new ways to communicate, make decisions, delegate and manage conflict. In the end, your arsenal of professional skills will be tough to beat.

How do I find an executive coach?

You can see the need for an executive coach and you are interested in working with one, but where do you find one? Begin the search for an executive coach within your own personal and professional network. You never know who your friends and acquaintances may know. From there, check out a professional social media platform like LinkedIn to refine your search, or check out recommendations. If you are located near a university, connect with a business leader who may be able to help. Ask if they know any executive coaches in the area. If all else fails, try an internet search to see what the search results come up with.



Don't wait to hire one if you think you need one. Part of the secret to effective executive coaching is timing. Timing is - as always - everything. So if you envisage any forthcoming challenges, start looking at executive coach candidates sooner rather than later. Get to know them and establish a working relationship before a crisis hits.

Here are five tips to assist in finding the right coach for you:

- **Look at many.** Don't just consider a couple of possible coaches. You may be limiting your options. Consider multiple candidates and weigh their credentials accordingly
- **Look at the dynamic.** Even though the principal objective of an executive coach is to push you beyond your professional comfort level, make sure that you feel personally comfortable working with whomever you choose
- **Look to a specific goal.** Have a clear goal in mind. In your interaction with potential candidates, use that goal as a frame of reference to determine which is best suited to help you achieve it
- **Look to the end.** If you're considering an executive coaching experience, be thinking at least a year ahead.
- **Look to your leadership.** Board or Senior Management approval is often required prior to hiring an executive coach so ensure that you have permission in place. Then, after a few months, consider asking your colleagues to see if they've noticed demonstrable improvements in your management skills¹⁹



To further help you identify the right person for the job, angle interview questions around their personal coaching philosophy, process and style.²⁰ How will they know how to help you?

Lastly, make sure you ask and understand about the metrics they use. In other words, how will you both know if the coaching has been a success? Have a candid conversation with them.

¹⁹ "Coaching: The Fad That Won't Go Away." *Fast Company*, 10 Apr. 2006. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/919160/coaching-fad-won%E2%80%99t-go-away>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

²⁰ Grace Andrews. "Leadership: Executive Coaching -- Fuel or Folly?" *Fast Company*, 18 June 2007. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/660316/leadership-executive-coaching-fuel-or-folly>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

Working with an executive coach isn't easy. In fact, it takes a tremendous amount of dedication. An executive coach will challenge your long-held habits and beliefs, and happily push the periphery of your professional comfort zone. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to embrace the challenges they present.

As individuals advance to the executive level, development feedback becomes increasingly important, more infrequent, and more unreliable ... many executives plateau in critical interpersonal and leadership skills.

Anna Maravelas.²¹

Meet with your coach weekly or monthly or as often as you need or want to. Yet be mindful of becoming too dependent on their advice. Do not lean too heavily on them because when your time together ends, as it inevitably will, the mission changes: You become the mission leader, a business professional with emboldened management skills fit for even the toughest scenarios the economy and the competition might send your way.

The future in numbers

Twenty years ago, executive coaching was often a measure reserved for the 'problem' person in the office. That is no longer the case. Today, executive coaching is used to further develop highly-skilled and highly-valued leaders.

Take a look at the numbers:

- In 2006, 43% of CEOs and 71% of senior executive team members had executive coaches²²
- 92% of coached leaders plan to use an executive coach again²³
- And, most impressive: 63% of organisations were planning to increase use of executive coaching in the next five years²⁴

Now, seven years later, the numbers are an indication that executive coaching is far more than just another passing trend.

Forbes writer Matt Symonds writes that 'corporate titans' are committing billions

²¹ "What an Executive Coach Can Do for You." <<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/4853.html>>. Harvard Business School. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

²² "Coaching: The Fad That Won't Go Away." Fast Company, 10 Apr. 2006. <<http://www.fastcompany.com/919160/coaching-fad-won%E2%80%99t-go-away>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid



of dollars on executive coaching each year in the United States alone.²⁵ MBA programmes around the world are devoting staggering amounts of money to provide executive coaching for their students as they learn and grow. The Wharton School in Philadelphia recently committed to a two-year coaching experience as part of a programme overhaul.²⁶ Likewise, students at EMST (European School of Management and Technology) in Berlin are spending 5-8 times as much time learning from executive coaches than any other business school on the continent.²⁷ All of this in an effort to further develop a new breed of extremely self-aware, sharp and talented communicators to lead enterprises of the future.

*There is a great demand in the workplace for immediate results, and coaching can provide that.*²⁸

Michael Goldsberg.

Oh, yes. The 'Outside the Box' objective perspective is here to stay.

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²⁵ Matt Symonds "Executive Coaching - Another Set of Clothes for the Emperor?" Forbes Magazine, 21 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/mattsymonds/2011/01/21/executive-coaching-another-set-of-clothes-for-the-emperor/>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

²⁶ Leadership. <<http://www.wharton.upenn.edu/mba/student-experience/leadership.cfm>>. Wharton University. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.

²⁷ Matt Symonds. "Executive Coaching - Another Set of Clothes for the Emperor?" Forbes Magazine, 21 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/mattsymonds/2011/01/21/executive-coaching-another-set-of-clothes-for-the-emperor/>>. Web. 22 Sept. 2013

²⁸ "What an Executive Coach Can Do for You." <<http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/4853.html>>. Harvard Business School. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.