

## **Executive Coaching — Is It Right for *Your* Organization?**

*By David Chinsky*

Leadership development programs continue to evolve from an historical reliance on classroom-type learning and job rotations to more of an emphasis on 360-degree feedback, action learning and individual or team coaching. Once used only as a last resort to salvage troubled staffers, coaching now is part of the standard leadership development regimen for many executives and other talented “high potentials.” As reported on CNN, leading companies from around the world are now providing their best employees with what “star athletes have long had: a trusted advisor to help (them) reach their goals.”

Coaching programs are often employed by an HR executive to help a team or an individual achieve greater clarity of vision or purpose, and to increase self awareness (an important component of emotional intelligence). Coaching solutions are increasingly becoming the strategy of choice for HR executives working to prevent what the Conference Board has called the four most important derailers facing business leaders today:

- hesitancy to take necessary business risks,
- personal arrogance and insensitivity,
- controlling leadership style, and
- reluctance to tackle difficult people issues.

Coaching can best be viewed as practical, goal-focused, one-on-one or group learning. While often used to develop specific leadership skills, coaching also inspires individuals and their teams to challenge their current constraints and to explore new possibilities. The experienced coach will help reveal professional and personal paradigms that may limit an executive’s success, and help clients create breakthrough results in the areas that are most important to them and their organizations. In the process, the coach will provide new tools to enhance the client’s own personal excellence as a leader, manager and coach.

Individuals working with a coach have access to a confidante with whom they can safely explore new ideas and approaches, difficult situations and/or perceived blocks to accomplishing their work and life objectives. Coaches hold their clients accountable for the commitments they make to themselves, and work to bring out the best in their clients on a consistent basis. Coaching concentrates on where individuals are now, and what they are willing to do to get where they want to be in the future.

### ***Selecting a Coach***

The selection of a competent and experienced coach can be a challenge. There are many former consultants, corporate “refugees” and licensed counselors who have taken up the practice of coaching without benefit of formal coach training and certification. The International Coach Federation (ICF), now representing over 10,000 coaches worldwide, has formally accredited over 30 coach training programs. Each of these programs provides foundational skill training for coaches, and many go on to provide a rigorous certification process designed to ensure competence for coaches graduating from their programs.

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Other things to look for?

- Certification from an accredited coach training program (such as The Coaches Training Institute, Corporate Coach University, the Hudson Institute, B-Coach, etc.) to help screen out coaches for whom this type of work is more of a novelty than a profession and a calling,
- The coach's experience and professionalism,
- An ability to ask tough, strategic questions,
- The willingness to challenge individual and team thinking, and
- A capacity for innovation, creativity and collaboration.

Many coaches will demonstrate their skills during a complimentary session. Don't be afraid to take advantage of this opportunity. While specific client references are not always available due to the confidential nature of coaching, most experienced coaches will be able to produce a handful of clients who have agreed to speak with others about their experience being coached. When interviewing prospective coaches, ask:

- What is your coaching experience? (number of individuals coached, years of experience)
- Where did you obtain your coach-specific training?
- Do you hold an International Coach Federation (ICF) credential, or are you enrolled in an ICF-accredited training program?
- What is your coaching specialty or niche?
- What specialized skills or experience do you bring to your coaching?
- What process or methodology best describes your approach to coaching?
- What are some of your coaching success stories? (specific examples of individuals who have done well and examples of how you have added value)

You can expect to see measurable differences at the completion of a coaching engagement. In addition to the fresh perspectives gained from a coach, clients can expect a variety of outcomes depending on their stated goals. For some, it may be enhanced thinking and decision-making skills, while for others it may be enhanced interpersonal proficiency and increased self confidence. Experienced coaches don't shy away from establishing metrics early on in the coaching process. These measures might include increased income/revenue, obtaining a promotion, enhanced productivity and/or improved performance feedback from a sample of the individual's direct reports, colleagues, customers, boss, etc.

Bob Nardelli, CEO of Home Depot has said of coaching, "I absolutely believe that people, unless coached, never reach their full potential." John Russell, of Harley-Davidson, has said "I never cease to be amazed at the power of the coaching process to draw out the skills or talent that was previously hidden within an individual, and to invariably find a way to solve a problem previously thought unsolvable." Professional coaching, when delivered by trained and certified coaches, helps clients take more effective and focused actions, create momentum around results and become more masterful at creating and sustaining relationships.

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