

Industry Insights

## Coach can help company leadership reach highest score

All managers benefit, but finding the right fit is important

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by [Art Shriberg, Richa Kumari and Vincent Brown](#)

Who is your favorite coach? Why?

That person is probably the coach of an athletic team. In the United States, we often equate coaching with athletes. It's likely that your favorite coach helps players become more technically efficient and more productive members of the team. The coach might also know when to give the team members a pat on the back or praise them in public.

In business language coaches are "high-touch" people. It is hard to imagine a team or even an individual competitive athlete not having a coach, and athletes often choose a particular team because they want to play for a certain coach.

For those with limited interest in sports, there is another way of understanding the importance of coaching. Leaders are evaluated constantly on how they think, how they feel and what they do. This is often called head, heart and hands leadership. An effective coach can help you understand and leverage each of these aspects of your leadership style, and can help you in adding to your repertoire of knowledge, skills and tools.

It is becoming apparent that to be successful in almost every profession, it is extremely useful to have someone who will know when to pat you on the back and, when necessary, kick you in the rear.

In the 2005 Training and Development survey, 88 percent of respondents said they use coaching in the workplace. It appears that business leaders often serve as coaches as they are being coached and, just as athletic coaches often go to clinics or intern under a more experienced coach, we find business coaches also learn the art from the experts.

Coaching is related to, but different from mentoring and onboarding. Author and consultant Ken Blanchard refers to coaching in a business context as "high-task" and "high-relationship" behavior. The coach deals with a specific current situation and gives the person the support needed, whether it is by teaching a skill or by building confidence. Mentoring, on the other hand, is used to describe a longer-term, more intensive relationship that is aimed at providing ongoing guidance for a successful career and not just in specific tasks. In business,

it is best if your coach or mentor is not your boss since the evaluative responsibility of the boss may get in the way of the open relationship needed for coaching.

Various studies show that up to 60 percent of leaders fail to meet organizational expectations in the first 18 months and it takes an average of about six months for a mid-level manager to adjust to a new job.

Onboarding is a way to quickly integrate leaders and managers into the organization and shorten the learning curve. It involves identifying and assigning a short-term intensive internal coach for a new hire to help make the transition easier.

Coaching, mentoring, and onboarding all have different formats and goals, but each requires careful management to ensure the transfer of knowledge is maximized. It is important, though, to separate these three from training, which is based purely on skill, with no required relationship component at all between the trainer and the trainee beyond the actual training session.

At what level in the organization does one need a coach? More importantly, when does a leader know that he or she needs to be coached? The conventional wisdom was that only senior leaders need to be coached, but as more and more studies show the benefits of executive coaching, it is increasingly becoming apparent that managers at all levels can benefit from coaching.

While good coaches can often be found internally within an organization, it is important to remember that coaching can often be provided by an external agent, particularly in case of the senior leadership team, where there may be many issues, including that of confidentiality. That may necessitate hiring a coach who is not a part of the workforce that reports to this leadership team. Coaching can also be provided to teams and organizations, just as it is to individuals, again, paralleling the coaching process in the world of sports.

Once the need for coaching is identified, there are many ways to go about the process. Finding the right coach is key, and whether the coach is external or internal, individual or team, one can get a coach through a careful screening process, which may involve using a coach who comes highly recommended by trusted colleagues, or finding one through professional coaching Web sites such as the **International Coach Federation** or the **Worldwide Association of Business Coaches**.

*Shriberg is a professor of leadership at Xavier University and a management consultant. Kumari is co-author of the book "Practicing Leadership: Principles and Activities" and a consultant. Brown is managing partner of Global Lead Management Consulting, and co-author of the book "Phoenix Principles." To contact them, e-mail [authors@inclusiveleadership.com](mailto:authors@inclusiveleadership.com).*