

Executive coaching spans many backgrounds and experiences

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by [Scott Rawdon](#)

Business First

Mark Russell, a vice president with **Grange Insurance Co.**, knows that there's more to being an executive than simply making the right decisions. Achieving success in the modern world takes expressing oneself clearly and maintaining a professional presence, Russell said.

"It's the way that you handle yourself," he said.

Trusting an executive coach to provide an objective, outside view of oneself can do wonders, he said, for developing that presence and, in turn, furthering one's own career and moving the entire company forward.

Russell is one of the original drivers at Grange - along with the CEO and human resource professionals - who are leading the charge to create a culture where coaching is widely used and accepted. Russell regularly takes part in executive coaching, mainly focusing on presentation skills, and some of the employees he manages do so as well.

"You need someone who's going to push you outside of your comfort zone," he said, "and someone who's candidly going to tell you how to be more successful."

Anyone can benefit from coaching if he or she is willing to work, said Ann Gallagher, a coach and president of the **Gallagher Consulting Group** in Columbus. Often, she said, executives hire coaches because they have an idea of what they want in their careers, but they don't know how to get there.

"They may get to a point where they won't get promoted anymore without the proper social skills. Not everyone's a leader, but we can still help people find their potential," she said.

About 10 years ago, some executives were embarrassed to hire coaches because they didn't want to admit that they had shortcomings, said Gallagher.

"Now it's more of a status symbol than something to be embarrassed about," she said.

Coaching is cool

Executive coaching has enjoyed an explosion of popularity in the last five years, said Barbara Griesse, president of TAP Training Solutions. Companies tend to hire employees for their skills, but all those great skills are meaningless, she said, if employees can't work together.

"The fix is, they go to training or they get a coach," she said.

Griesse said companies are not hiring coaches to replace senior management, but rather to help senior managers. Coaching, she said, reduces staff turnover by increasing job satisfaction among employees. Coaching can, however, be expensive because several sessions are needed, she said. Most coaches, on the average, charge about \$100 per hour, though some charge as much as \$1,000 per hour.

"It's like going to a personal trainer," said Griesse. "What can one session do?"

It's also important, said Griesse, for executives to interview many coaches before hiring one to be sure that their and the coach's personalities are a comfortable match, and that the coach's expertise matches the needs of the executive's organization.

Evaluating coaches can be difficult, said Laura Armstrong, president of Columbus-based **Diversified Career Services Inc.**

"A distinction can be made between the 'content' coach and the 'process' coach," she said.

Many people in coaching have been psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors, and they are transitioning into coaching by the thousands for many reasons, said Armstrong. Most of these people take additional training, usually from an organization or school to become oriented to the demands and techniques of coaching.

"What these people already have is the process part of coaching, such as skills in counseling, listening, feedback, intervention strategies, resources, experience and so on," she said.

They also usually hold some credentials in this field that certifies their expertise. They may coach a variety of clients or they may decide to serve a niche or specific population.

"Coaches not trained in counseling like to say that coaching is not counseling, and it is not," said Armstrong.

But coaching uses many of the skills of counseling, and some coaches are attracted to the profession because it offers an alternative employment opportunity for which they can train and become qualified. Often these people come from related fields such as human resources or corporate training.

"The synergy created between the coach and client creates momentum by setting better goals. The executive develops new skills that translate to increased satisfaction and success," she said.

Scott Rawdon is a Columbus-based freelance writer.