

BusinessWise

Care of the soul: How to select an effective executive coach

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In 30 years of behavioral consulting, I have found that executive coaching touches the heart of consulting because it focuses on the cornerstone of all change: the soul of the individual and that individual within a team.

Change is terribly hard because it calls into question patterns and images of our pasts upon which we have based our definition of who we are in the present and who we want to project into the future. It takes courage to select a true coach - one who also has the courage to probe that soul.

Athletes know when they have hit the groove, even if they are not sure just how to explain it.

"When you are in it, you do not hear the crowds, you do not think about the situation - you just know what to do." (Tony Gwynn)

"It is something way beyond confidence - it is a strange calmness - a type of euphoria. I felt I could run all day without tiring, that I could almost pass through the competition physically." (Pele)

Dan Fouts said that when he slipped into the zone he found he could throw the football "without any stress or pain, and it would just go."

For premier performers, the experience appears to be one in which active thought rises to a higher level of awareness. These people raise this level of consciousness and focus in an internal way on their personal skills in the context of the team.

It is a harmony, a lack of interference. It is the essence of focusing - the art of flow. Earvin "Magic" Johnson, former **Los Angeles Lakers** star, said, "When we are in the zone on a fast break, I know exactly what my guys will do relative to the set-up of the defense - and then we execute - the play and the opponents."

This process of understanding and visualizing the total scope of the team-task at hand is one of the phenomena needing exploration in the corporate world. Employees, like athletes today, are better educated, better skilled and more complex than ever before.

Peter Drucker, noted management theorist, predicts that the new organization will resemble a symphony orchestra. Each musician is a high-grade specialist who takes directions straight from the director-CEO. In sports, each athlete is a highly skilled individual who takes direction straight from the coach in order to create a harmonic flow. Corporate coaching creates the same integrated and holistic teamwork required to deal with short-and-long-term issues, as well as immediate crises needing a cohesive team response.

The coach provides the team environment and the opportunity to develop specialized skills that are complimentary to the team in action.

Trust and intimacy are required to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing growth and development. Both coach and individual need to continuously demonstrate personal integrity, genuine honesty and sincerity.

Here are some things to look for in a coach:

- Capacity to be fully conscious, present and flexible during the coaching process, to use one's own intuition, to see many ways to proceed and to choose what is most effective.
- Ability to encourage, explore and reinforce the individual's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs and suggestions.
- Ability to ask questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the individual.
- Ability to communicate with language that is clear, articulate and direct and to reframe and articulate issues from another perspective.
- Capacity to help the individual integrate and evaluate information through the process of inquiring for greater understanding, awareness and clarity.
- Ability to create opportunities for ongoing learning and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to results.

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