



Getting the best results from executive coaching

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One-on-one executive coaching is now seen by major corporations as an effective means of professional development. Its rising popularity is based on demonstrable payback from increased productivity, profitability and retention of key personnel. Unlike many other forms of development such as seminars or conferences, coaching is not a spectator sport. Its straightforward purpose is to produce results for the organization by fostering awareness, behavior change and growth among its executives. It is done in real time working on real issues.

With people, careers and company performance at stake, the organization, as well as the executive, needs to "shop" wisely for the coach who best fits their requirements. If executive coaching is in your future, consider these key points as part of your selection process.

Involve a company representative and the executive in the selection process. Before interviewing coaches, these individuals must develop a shared view of the coaching agenda. No coach can be effective if the company representative sees the agenda as "improved communication skills" while the executive understands the agenda to be "getting rid of the dead wood" in his organization.

Look beyond academic credentials to learn more about the coach's professional experiences, values and motivations to assess "best fit." Credentials are important but they don't necessarily identify the best coaches. Skilled, self-aware coaches will speak easily and thoughtfully about themselves and their approach to coaching.

Ask coaches about previous assignments to demonstrate their understanding of organizational dynamics and cultural influences. The range and depth of a coach's experience are essential to establishing credibility with the organization and individual executives. From their responses, determine whether, in spite of their experience, they express curiosity in your particular agenda or whether they present themselves as having "been there, done that." The best coaches are committed to learning and display this commitment, in part, through a genuine interest and curiosity about new environments

Ask coaches about their own professional development priorities. Good coaches practice what they preach; they actively and continually work to expand their capabilities and

sensibilities. If they stumble in their responses or provide high-level, generalized comments, they probably are not "walking the talk."

Ask coaches to describe previous assignments. If their responses are heavily weighted toward what "they" did to advance their clients' agendas, they are more likely consultants. Consulting fosters dependency; coaches work to enable independence. Top coaches will highlight the accomplishments of their clients with little or no mention of their own successes.

Find out if the coach has ever been fired; explore the circumstances that led to that outcome. Good coaches have been fired and the best will fire themselves. If for example, the client fails to show up for coaching and is unwilling to explore the reasons for his behavior, a good coach may suggest terminating the relationship (rather than continue to invoice the company). Good coaches can be fired when they hold the mirror up too often and challenge the stories their clients hold tightly. Pulling punches and buying into the clients' rationale help to cultivate a coaching business but they do nothing to foster awareness and growth in their clients.

By factoring these key areas of inquiry into your selection process, you can be confident you have selected both a qualified coach and one who is fully committed to your success. In the unlikely event you find that the coach or the coaching process are not what you expected, say so. Responsibility for results rests with the company representatives, the client and the coach; each has a stake in the outcome -- which is, in and of itself, a significant developmental opportunity.

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