

Executive Coaching: How and Why it Works

By Lawrence M. Kohn

Just because someone has achieved business success doesn't mean they are capable in all aspects of their current job. More importantly, their lack of required skills could create a disaster.

Sometimes the solution is seminars or self-study. But, when those techniques fail or seem inadequate, there's another approach that has produced impressive results — Executive Coaching.

An Executive Coach is a professional mentor — a consultant who works one-on-one with business owners, executives and professionals. Executive Coaches teach new skills and help to integrate those skills into a daily routine. Similar to an athletic coach, they teach and they motivate. Their numbers are growing and their impact has proven to be positive.

This article provides a description of the process of Executive Coaching and the reasons it produces results.

How “Executive Coaching” Works:

The process of Executive Coaching begins when a highly compensated individual is identified with a need. This person is valuable to the company, but is lacking in a specific area.

It could be a top executive who has a management style that is hostile. It could be a professional who has significant technical skills, but needs to learn how to acquire new clients.

The need may be related to productivity, time management, running a meeting, delegating, shareholder relations, creditor relations, client relations or public speaking.

The relationship between the Executive Coach and the client is confidential. This is important because the client needs the ability to discuss issues

that may be embarrassing or politically undesirable. Since the Executive Coach does not report back to the company, the success of the coach will be revealed in the changed behavior of the client.

Executive Coaching has surprised many executives who started out feeling quite skeptical, replacing denial and frustration with optimism, self-confidence and enthusiasm.

Executive Coaching is conducted via telephone. The duration of the meetings will vary, ranging from fifteen minutes to one hour. The frequency will depend on the need, although monthly contact is a minimum.

In the first meeting, the Executive Coach and client discuss the identified need. The Executive Coach wants to learn the employee's perspective.

Then the two collaborate on a program to make improvements. Through a series of questions and answers, the Executive Coach will develop a path to help the client take steps toward the desired goals. They negotiate specific actions and deadlines, until the client finds them acceptable.

At the end of the session, they agree on the subsequent appointment.

At the next meeting, there is an evaluation of the client's behavior, additional tips and suggestions, discussion about solutions, an agreement about new assignments and the date of the next meeting. This process continues until the desired goal is achieved.

Why “Executive Coaching” Works:

There are many reasons why Executive Coaching is a powerful tool in helping people develop new skills.

1. It is Personalized.

Unlike seminars, Executive Coaching is conducted one-on-one. Therefore, the information provided by an Executive Coach applies directly to the needs of the client. There is no wasted time covering familiar territory. And the Executive Coach can use motivational techniques geared specifically to the client’s personality.

2. It is Educational.

The client gains insight into relative issues. The Executive Coach is a teacher with information that may be new to the client. At a minimum, the Executive Coach brings a new perspective. Clients learn from their Executive Coaches.

3. It Creates Accountability.

The process of negotiating assignments and then having follow-up meetings increases a client’s chances of experimenting with change. The client is constantly aware that he or she will have to report on their progress.

4. It Promotes Practice.

Learning requires practice. The ongoing nature of the Executive Coaching process provides an opportunity to practice new skills until they become comfortable and ingrained. Executive Coaches may meet with clients weekly or monthly for several months, or even years, providing insight, advice and motivation.

5. It is Safe.

Because it is private and confidential, the client can express real feelings without the fear of embarrassment or reprisal.

6. It is Objective.

The Executive Coach can act as a voice of reason. Since the Executive Coach is not a full-time employee, he or she can present information without being influenced by internal politics.

7. It is Reasonable.

Executive Coaching succeeds because the Executive Coach identifies small, achievable steps. Progress is expected over time. This removes the fear of failure and increases the likelihood of experimenting with new ideas.

8. It is Consistent.

Since the Executive Coach is compensated, he or she will stay on the job. Unlike volunteer mentoring, which often gets postponed, Executive Coaching continues to address the need until results are achieved.

9. It is Focused.

The Executive Coach is skilled in the process of coaching and will stay on point — even when the client is evasive or indecisive.

10. It is Practical.

Since the work is done via telephone and the meetings are short, there is no travel or parking requirement. That makes it easy to schedule and implement — even in a busy day.

Climbing the ladder of success can put people in a precarious place. Executive Coaching is a powerful educational tool that can change old habits — even those that are deeply engrained. It has surprised many executives who started out feeling quite skeptical, replacing denial and frustration with optimism, self-confidence and enthusiasm. The result for the business? Purely positive, with higher goals identified... and reached.

About the author:

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