



The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations

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This article first appeared in the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, 2003, 1(3),86-88. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). Email John Lazar at john@ijco.info for such permission.

Journal information:
www.ijco.info

Purchases:
www.pcpionline.com

2003

ISSN 1553-3735

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Professional Coaching Publications, Inc.

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Surrenda and Thompson have undertaken a challenging task in this article as they attempt to identify common issues surrounding executive coaching and address possible solutions. This task is difficult because the field of executive coaching is still emergent, and covers a broad range of services under one name. The field itself is undergoing the same rapid pace of change that its organizational clients are experiencing, resulting in a scramble by organizations and coaches to match services to needs. This commentary attempts to expand on certain key points in areas where, it is hoped, more discussion will add to the usefulness for organizations, clients and coaches: executive coaching areas and outcomes; setting coaching objectives; coach qualifications; fees; and a "best case" case study that illustrates the positive outcomes of executive coaching.

The case study authors point out a few trouble areas for executive coaches and their clients, and then offer suggestions, both for management and improvement of the coaching engagement by coaches and the organizations that hire them. They give a brief overview of the rationale for hiring executive coaches, objectives, and key areas of the coaching agenda. The authors comments can be read to characterize coaching as an intervention to improve an executive's performance and business results, with the primary focus being behavioral change. Some expansion might be helpful here.

The Scope of Executive Coaching

Business results and success are obviously critical drivers and measures of the efficacy of executive coaching. However, there are numerous levels at which executive coaches work to achieve the coaching objectives, reminding users that executive coaching is not just a short-term performance fix. Rather, it is often important and effective when it is focused on sustainable (and generally longer-term) development and leverage of the executive's potential. It is the difference between fixing something that is broken, and growing something powerful from a seedling. When an executive's weaknesses are the focus of coaching, the executive ends up with stronger weaknesses but no significantly better chance of major business success. However, when coaching also focuses on developing the executive's strengths or potential, the possibilities for transformative business success are much greater.

As one executive is reported to have said, "I may be schizophrenic, but both of us have to run this company." Treating the executive's "psychology" alone, except in cases where serious psychological issues exist, may not be enough to develop her ability to succeed in "real time".* The typical executive must grow herself continuously as she is faced with rapid change and new assignments. To stay effective, she must learn

the skills of learning and self-transformation, so that she can both deal with the effects she experiences from the business, and affect the business herself.

Using Lazar and Bergquist's helpful taxonomy of business coaching (*The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*, volume 1, number 1, Winter, 2003), there are at least three types of business coaching: performance (behavioral improvement), executive (decision-making, thinking, feeling to affect results), and alignment (focus on values, purpose, beliefs). I believe all three relate to types of executive coaching, and would propose to re-name "executive" type coaching under their taxonomy something like "executive skills or presence" coaching. In any event, their taxonomy leads to an awareness that much of an executive's positive impact on the organization and business results comes not only from the executive's behavior, but from her level of cognition and emotional understanding and skill, and from her alignment and moral development.

*Note:

Stephen Berglas, in the June, 2002, edition of *The Harvard Business Review*, warns of the danger of using a coach who is not grounded in psychological principles. It is important that an executive coach have awareness and understanding of the psychology of executive coaching in order to recognize the need for a psychological intervention. However, a psychotherapeutic background may cause the coach to approach the client in ways that are a turn-off for the client. In addition, development of potential requires additional skills not necessarily inherent in a psychology degree program.

Another way to look at the scope of executive coaching is to consider the role of “leadership development”. Leadership skills include those of execution, or performance (as laid out in the popular management book, *Execution*, by former Honeywell CEO Larry Bossidy and consultant Ram Charan). Included in this category are setting and enforcing accountabilities, identifying, managing and coaching the right people for the job, and providing appropriate operating processes to support performance.

Leadership skills also include cognitive and emotional skills, such as decision-making, strategic thinking, creativity, and what has been called emotional intelligence. These “skills” are closer to ways of “being” than of doing, as they inform the executive’s overall operation on the job and begin to have an impact on the organization’s culture.

Finally, leadership coaching incorporates a level of moral or ethical development that deals with the areas of character, courage and integrity. This is the area that addresses values and values conflicts, moral dilemmas, and the infusion of meaning into work, both for the individual executive and the organization. This area of coaching deals with development of the executive as a guardian of the interests of all key stakeholders in the organization, and the developer of the organization’s potential. This developmental approach to coaching focuses on transformation of the executive’s “being”, which then leads to sustainable growth, as opposed to behavioral coaching alone that may affect performance only in the short run. With the recent corporate scandals and public hue and cry for ethical business, this view of developmental coaching for all executives is even more relevant.

Viewed this way, it is clear that there may be multiple layers or levels of identified objectives from the coaching engagement. These categories, and others, should be considered in a corporate policy regarding executive coaching. Such a policy should ideally be set by senior company executives, including HR, with consideration of the company’s overall business strategy and the type of leadership needed in order to support the strategy. This expansion of the definition or categories of executive coaching allows for the possibility of a higher return on the investment in coaching as it focuses on development of sustainable leadership to implement the company’s strategy.

The Right Coach and Right Contract

This view of the power of executive coaching informs the selection of the right coaches for the job. The authors assert that executive coaches should hold degrees in psychology or an MBA (or equivalent experience) as proof of their credential to coach. The danger in this

definition is that it omits certain qualified executive coaches, while granting credibility to other executive coaches who are as a practical matter unqualified. An enhanced definition of qualification might list the following alternatives:

- * graduate degree in field related to human development (psychology, education, social science, philosophy) or business (business, law), and
- * training in the psychology, methods and philosophy of executive coaching, and
- * certification as an executive coach by a recognized certifying body concerned with quality and best practices, based on record of results, and
- * experience in business or as coach to business executives, demonstrating understanding and appreciation for business as the context for, and measure of, the executive’s development.

In addition, the authors appear to endorse hourly billing for coaching as is done in psychotherapy. In fact, executive coaching is often billed on a retainer basis, equated to the scope of impact the executive’s success can have on the organization and its bottom line. Coaching efficacy is measured by the executive’s contribution to the on-going success of the organization, not what happens in the coaching session. In addition, retainer billing motivates the executive to maximize her coaching and moves the focus from the cost of coaching to the results. The coaching contract for retainer billing can provide for appropriate bases for termination and pro rata billing.

Finally, the authors discuss reporting on the efficacy of coaching and its results to key stakeholders. It is, as they say, important that the executive report periodically to her boss about the results she is experiencing as a result of her coaching. However, her supervisor should be able to observe results as well – as will others with whom she works. As one coach puts it, “My test of the success of the coaching is that the client gets promoted.” While all coaching engagements may not lead directly to promotion, this remark points to the fact that an executive’s development should lead to greater overall effectiveness and the invitation to play a larger role in the organization by company leaders who witness or experience the executive’s positive growth and impact. The critical role of designing appropriate coaching objectives cannot be over-stated. Many development planning formats used in companies fail to create objectives that can be measured in various ways. Reporting on the results of coaching will be made easier and the results more transparent when the objectives are specifically and clearly identified.

When Coaching Is Done Right

The authors cite two case studies to illustrate problems with executive coaching. The cause of clarity regarding executive coaching may be served by inclusion of a case study that went “right”, as it can be instructive to see what makes the coaching engagement successful. One example: An executive coach began coaching an HR director who reported to the senior VP of HR, and wanted coaching for herself. She was a natural “doer” and therefore found performance easy. So, while she didn’t need much performance coaching, she was frustrated, as talented people often can be, by a lack of mentoring and channels for her own learning and development. As a practical performer, she found executive development classes and coaching focused on psychological measures of limited usefulness.

The coach tailored her coaching to developing her executive’s thinking and emotional abilities, which were appropriate for her current job but needed expansion for her to get to the next level (she had risen through the ranks from an administrative position years earlier). The coach also focused on the client’s “alignment” as she articulated her values and beliefs and business philosophy, which became one of “people development” and productivity, making her a leader in the HR world and attracting the attention of the CEO. As she developed her executive presence, her performance became stronger and more visible to senior management. To maintain her motivation to grow, the coach used her on-the-job experiences as learning “labs”, and worked to help her integrate the learning for future use. Her coaching moved among performance (how to hold average performers accountable), executive skills (strategic thinking, leadership vs. management), and areas of moral and ethical development involving courage to make tough calls.

The coach held the client accountable to achieve the goals she set for herself in areas of business results and development of herself and others. As a result, when her boss retired, she survived an external search to become the first, and youngest, woman appointed to a senior position as head of HR, reporting to the CEO. She has since made major contributions to the organization and become widely recognized as an influential and valuable player at the top. This “best case” scenario is instructive as an illustration of the power of executive coaching and of factors that might inform management of executive coaching in organizations. While procedures for management are important to protect the integrity of the process and to insure its value to the organization, management of executive coaching should be driven by the development needs presented by the business strategy as they apply to the executive client.

This commentary is offered as an expansion of the author’s comments in the areas of characterizing the coverage of executive coaching and setting objectives, coach selection and fees, and lessons learned from a best case coaching scenario. Continued dialogue in this rapidly emerging field will greatly benefit clients and coaches alike, as organizations continue to become aware of, and leverage, the power of executive coaching to drive business results.

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“In my old definition, work was performance alone. In simplest terms, *work* equaled *doing*. But connected with that definition were all the Self 1 judgmental meanings attributed to doing something *well*: success, failure, competence, incompetence, being better than one person, being less good than another.

But learning and enjoyment are still inherent dimensions of work, even if we’re not paying attention to them. You are either growing, evolving, and developing your capabilities or you are stagnating. In the worst-case scenario, you are ‘devolving’ while working – becoming less yourself. Regardless of where you happen to be on the spectrum, the learning component is part of working.

The same is true with *enjoyment*. You are feeling *something* between agony and ecstasy while you are working... The need to enjoy is universal. What varies is the degree to which we acknowledge and value this component of our lives. Too often we believe that enjoyment is what has to be sacrificed to the goal of excellence. The best performers in all fields provide much evidence to the contrary. Most of us know from personal experience that we perform better when we are enjoying ourselves.”

-- W. T. Gallwey, *The Inner Game of Work*

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