

Do I Need an Executive Coach?

To understand the answer to this question we must first understand the question. What exactly *is* an executive coach? Let's begin with the definition of an 'executive'.

Dictionary.com Unabridged has the following definition:

ex·ec·u·tive – noun

A person or group of persons having administrative or supervisory authority in an organization.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines 'coach' as:

coach – noun

A person who gives instruction or guidance to another;

A private tutor employed to prepare a student for an examination;

A person who trains or directs others.

From these definitions we can surmise most managers could use a coach from time to time. In fact, some managers keep a coach on retainer in order to build a long-term relationship and to establish a deeper rapport. But, the real question is; do you need a coach?

Before Hiring a Coach

There are four primary principles to keep in mind before deciding to hire an executive coach:

1. Self preparation is required in order to leverage the coach's advice i.e. don't expect the coach to do all the work
2. Expensive advice is not always the best, but cheap advice is usually cheap for a reason
3. The best coaches are not always those who have played the game, in fact good coaches can be found in fields outside your own
4. But the best coaches do understand how business works and how leadership leads.
5. The "chemistry" has to be right between the you and your executive coach

The Value of an Executive Coach

You should expect your coach to help you identify your personal strengths and weaknesses as well as those of your organization. A coach can help you discover hidden talents (personal and organizational) as well as new opportunities and potential pitfalls. A good

coach is not afraid to recommend another company's resources (people not within their own company) if the other company's products or services can benefit you or your business. Beware of the coach who tries to do it all. Seldom is a coach capable of helping you with all your needs, but a good coach should be able (and willing) to help you in your sourcing efforts.

Expect your coach to provide positive reinforcement as well as to deliver the tough message. When you make a change that results in a positive outcome your coach will expect, and help, you to celebrate. When you fail to make a change or when you mess up (and you will) a good coach will provide you the appropriate feedback.

An executive coach can also be used as a 'sounding board' for new ideas or troubling business situations. That means they can be there to listen while you work out the issues on your own. There is real value in having an experienced coach listen to your concerns and ideas, even when they don't give you advice. Beware of the coach who wants to you direction every time you open your mouth. This could be a sign of their insecurity.

A coach can teach you how to take time for yourself. It would be easy for a coach to focus totally on business issues however; a good coach helps you realize in order to get the best long-term results you must have balance in your life. Balance includes taking time for yourself and getting adequate relaxation.

A good coach should also help you:

- Serve as a sounding board before making critical decisions
- Establish goals and priorities
- Visualize and communicate your goals
- Accept and maintain accountability for your goals
- Plan on-going professional development
- Examine new business ideas and opportunities
- Develop appropriate questions and analysis

Do You Need a Coach?

Assess the following statements to help determine if there are any similarities to your situation or environment:

1. I am not sure I always get complete feedback from my direct reports.
2. The input I get from my team has to be requested.

3. I sometimes wish I had a trusted outsider to brainstorm ideas and concerns.
4. Our company is going through major changes and I don't feel like I can tax my team with more than just their respective day-to-day duties. I need someone to help me stay focused on important issues, not just the urgent issues.
5. My direct reports are good, but they lack the experience I need to be able to help me with certain strategic decision and business challenges.
6. I'm new to the company and would like an impartial perspective on company personnel.

This is just a short list of examples that could indicate your need for an outside coach. An executive coach can be extremely valuable if used for the right reasons and if the right coach is selected. This former football coach said it well:

*Coaches who can outline plays on a black board are a dime a dozen. The ones who win get inside their player and motivate. **Vince Lombardi***