

Practical Advice on Using an Executive Coach

from the Executive Coaching Roundtable



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Four Questions to Decide if You Need an Executive Coach

1 Structured Time for Reflection:

Do you have a structured way of regularly reflecting on your leadership, life, and work?

2 Trusted Confidant:

Are there people whom you trust to talk candidly about what really matters, including any concerns you may have about work, career, or life?

3 Relevant Expertise:

Do you have access to people who are adept in human behavior change, psychology, system dynamics, and organization development?

4 Timing:

Is this a time of change in your role, working relationships, or operating environment?

Roles an Executive Coach Can Play

1 Sounding Board

Your coach is someone with whom you can test out your ideas and explore aloud ways to approach specific situations.

2 Tough Questioner

Your coach can challenge your ideas and help you to clarify your thinking. Depending on your role, others may be reluctant to do this for you.

3 Witness

Your coach can observe you with neutrality and curiosity as you go about your work. This will help you gain perspective on progress made and areas for further development.

4 Advisor

Your coach can offer perspectives on particular situations based upon how others in your position have handled similar situations. Expect questions as well as suggestions.

5 Teacher

Sometimes your coach will be able to teach you a model for thinking about or handling a particular situation. Other times s/he will provide an article, book, or framework that can illuminate the situation.

6 Resource Broker

Your coach may provide referrals to other sources in response to specific concerns, needs, and goals that emerge.

7 Cheerleader

Your coach can help you acknowledge progress, celebrate successes, both large and small, and encourage you to move toward being the kind of leader/manager you want to be.

Possible Activities of Executive Coaching

1 Initial Three-way Meeting with your Boss

Coaching can start with a three-way meeting with your boss, your coach, and yourself to ensure alignment between the goals of the business and coaching. The discussion may focus on goals for coaching, how your boss will be involved, and any concerns or issues about coaching.

2 360 Interviews or Surveys

Your coach can interview or survey your boss, direct reports, and peers about how they see you as a manager or leader. This can provide new information about your leadership style as well as a baseline to assess progress.

3 Psychological Surveys

Your coach can use brief surveys such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or FIRO-B to provide a framework for understanding yourself and others better. Data from previous assessments may be integrated to create a more complete picture.

4 Meetings with Your Team

Your coach can attend a meeting with your team or key constituencies to gain firsthand information about how you manage meetings and relate to others.

5 Create Experiments

Your coach can help you to create experiments to test beliefs and try new behaviors. This will help you to improve effectiveness and identify opportunities for development that already exist in your day-to-day activities.

6 Specific Skills

Your coach can help you acquire and develop specific skills designed to enhance your performance (e.g. conducting performance management discussions, networking, chairing a meeting, creating a work plan with buy-in).

7 Previewing Critical Messages

Your coach can review drafts of sensitive letters, emails, and presentations to assure your intentions for the message are achieved.

Making the Best Use of Your Executive Coach

- 1** Focus on learning and self-improvement: Learning about yourself, others, systems, and your business.
- 2** Be clear with your coach about the limits of confidentiality.
- 3** Meet at least once every two or three weeks to get the momentum of coaching going and to assure there is an active and healthy exchange. Prepare to make a significant investment of time especially at the front end. This may require 5-6 hours in the first two months.
- 4** Track what you want to cover in your meetings with your coach (e.g. use a particular notebook or a coaching folder in which to drop reminders of topics to cover). Review your notes before your meeting with the coach and create your own agenda of topics to cover. Your coach will likely have an agenda of topics, too.
- 5** Everything is grist for the coaching mill. Topics may include strategic goals, business challenges, or performance management issues as well as feelings, failures, surprises, and personal challenges. Candor is key.
- 6** Expect to be both supported and challenged by your coach.
- 7** If the coach offers an idea that seems wrong or strange to you, first express curiosity, then challenge it. Don't accept or reject ideas too quickly.
- 8** Do your homework. Your coach is likely to ask you to read an article, observe yourself doing something, or practice some skill between meetings. Think of this as taking an important course that contributes to your ability to succeed.
- 9** Occasionally ask your coach to describe his/her experience in working with you. The way you manage your coach may provide hints as to how you manage others. This may illuminate what is missing from your management approach and personal operating style.
- 10** At the end of each meeting, tell your coach what was specifically helpful or not about that meeting.
- 11** Use coaching to acknowledge progress and celebrate successes, especially on tough issues in which you took risks.
- 12** Work with your coach to decide how and when to exit from the initial formal coaching effort. Decide how best to keep in touch and follow-up.