

# **What Is Executive Coaching?**

**...and does it work?**

## **Understanding the Concept**

All coaching is, taking a player where he can't take himself  
Bill, McCartney

Executive coaching is not new.

Executive coaching as a profession started in the 1980s. Then, it centered more on business improvement. Now, this profession has developed to cover a lot of areas from helping managers choose the right career options to managing difficult personal or professional relationships.

### **But what is coaching all about?**

As per The International Coach Federation (ICF):

"Coaching is an on-going partnership that helps clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life. Beginning with the clients' desires, coaching uses reporting, exploring, and a consistent commitment to move the client forward. Coaching accelerates the clients' progress by providing greater focus and awareness of choice. Coaching concentrates on where clients are today and what they are willing to do to get where they want to be tomorrow."

If this was too much to grasp, let's simplify.

Coaching involves a professional partnership between a coach and the client. Coaches listen to their client's problems or concerns, and then provide coaching through which the client determines what steps to take to overcome his or her problems and move ahead.

Coaches do not give advice, nor do they offer therapy. They simply act like a catalyst to help people achieve individual goals.

Through executive coaching, managers, business owners and executives alike get help in making the right moves, which they are not able to make on their own.

This does not mean that no one can work out things on their own. It rather means the opposite.

Everyone has some limitations, which directly or indirectly affect a number of areas in his or her life or how he or she looks at different situations in life and in business.

These limitations or weaknesses, whether mental, emotional or psychological, create barriers and hold up personal development.

This is when an Executive Coach comes in. The process of coaching helps people break those barriers themselves and pave the way to achieving their goals.

A number of people correlate the work of a Coach to that of a therapist.

That's not the same.

While a therapist focuses on analyzing your past actions and getting to the root of the problem, an Executive Coach concentrates on helping you to frame the right steps in future to achieve your individual goals.

A therapist might offer therapy and advice. A Coach does not normally do this.

If they do, they step across the line and into consultancy. That's not to say that you cannot offer advice. I frequently do. All I am interested in is helping my clients in whichever way possible!

A very good analogy of what an Executive Coach actually does is if we compare it to that of a Personal Fitness Trainer.

Consider you are joining a gym. Your fitness trainer will first ask you what you want to achieve. Whether you want to:

Lose weight?

Lose fat?

Build muscles?

Build endurance?

Increase stamina?

The trainer will then see where you stand now in relation to your goal.

For example, if you want to trim down body fat, you will be asked to take a body fat composition test to measure the current body fat level.

You may have to take a fitness test and may be asked about present eating habits. All this is a part of helping you get nearer to your goal.

The fitness trainer will first establish standards for you as to how much fat you intend to lose and over what period of time. It is based on all this that he designs a plan of action for you to reach your goal.

Having done this, he also supplies you with the required backing and support in the form of constant encouragement and motivation.

There may be many people who look towards reducing weight. But what they lack is the willpower and confidence to keep trying.

The trainer's job is to guide them through the difficult path towards their goal. He has to help the people achieve their goals more quickly and more effectively than if they tried by themselves.

This is what an Executive Coach does too.

What accelerated learning and NLP was to the eighties and nineties, the new kid on the block in the new millennium is definitely Executive Coaching.

So what actually is it and what are the benefits?

**The term "Executive Coaching" can be a bit misleading.** On the face of it one might think that it is a process where the Executives of a company receive some kind of individual development through coaching sessions, and you would be right.

Moreover, the term Executive Coaching can be applied to any type of corporate or leadership coaching.

Examples of which are:

- Top team executives
- Senior management
- Middle management
- Junior management
- Business owners
- Entrepreneurs

Executive coaching is a form of highly effective, customised, individual coaching through face to face or telephone sessions and it's main goals

are to help leaders and organisations to reduce their staff attrition, improve communications, enhance the leadership within the company, increase sales and profits, take your development to the next level and to assist you in formulating solutions to your challenges and difficulties.

Executive coaching is an individualised approach to your professional development that focuses on results and outcomes.

The definition of coaching according to the International Coach Federation, ICF

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### **The Need For Executive Coaching**

Today, every organisation has to ride the waves of change both from outside and from within.

As a result, the demands and challenges facing our leaders are immense: they must be able to lead the way with the vision and also be able to manage the task; they must anticipate changes in advance; they must have a higher level of self-awareness for themselves as well as their staff; they need to build highly motivated, high performing teams that deliver the results – the list goes on!

The demands placed upon today's leaders are ever increasing and they have to possess the skill sets and competencies to deliver the goods. Being a good all-rounder is what is essential for success, but how many of us have the complete package?

Every leader has their own strengths and weaknesses. It is the coach's role to help them to play to their strengths and to work on their weaknesses.

Here are some of the most common reasons why we are approached to design and implement Executive Coaching Programmes within organisations:

Their leaders may want to...

- Fine tune their interpersonal, confidence and advanced communication skills
- Be an outstanding and inspirational leader
- Think more strategically
- Be able to motivate and build productive teams
- Improve their internal political savvy
- Discuss their questions and concerns about how to handle situations that they can't discuss with others in their organisation
- Have someone around who understands what they're facing and whom they can confide in
- Improve their development as a person, as a leader and take the company on to the next level
- Raise their profile in their company and industry
- Be able to step back and look at their company or department from a different perspective
- Get some help sorting things out
- Earn what they are worth and get the credit for the work that they do
- Improve their business in every area
- No matter what the requirements are, it is the coaches aim to provide a sounding board for the coachee to work through the key issues and to provide solutions.

## How Does It Work & What Is The Role Of The Coach?

Executive coaching is most effective when the coach and the leader can have monthly, face to face one-on-one sessions over a set period of time.

These sessions normally last up to but no longer than 3 hours in duration.

Through a combination of assessments, role plays, assignments, action planning, projects, and solutions the coach assists the Executive to make those tough decisions and to help them overcome their challenges.

The content of the conversations develops as the coaching proceeds; there is no set formula. On the other hand, successful coaches have various models to provide structure and purpose to the conversations. Invariably they explore questions about personal purpose or mission, strengths and gifts, the organisational context, assumptions about leadership, keys to professional development, and new ways of thinking and behaving.

It is essential that the client is comfortable with their coach and it is therefore vital that there is some chemistry between the two parties.

Rather than actually **TELLING** someone the answers, a Coach is the catalyst for getting their client to find the answers themselves.

By asking challenging and thought provoking questions, a Coach can unlock the potential in a client.

Coaching is forward looking and focused on the action the coachee is willing to take to get what they want.

This in turn leads to greater:

- Self-awareness
- Focus
- Accountability

## **How Is A Typical Executive Coaching Programme Designed?**

Executive coaching solutions are always tailor made to meet the client's EXACT requirements and desired outcomes.

In order to improve the performance and to accelerate the leader's professional development it is recommended that the coach and the coachee go through an effective process with well-defined steps.

### **Phase One —Develop Formal Commitments**

During this phase the coach meets with the client/sponsor to identify the performance issues, formulate outcomes, clarify expectations and get commitments.

This phase can be completed either face to face or on the telephone. There may be some supporting documentation that will need to be completed through email/post.

### **Phase Two —Gather Information & Creation of Professional Development Plan**

During this phase the coach will gather information about the client's performance issues and will review any existing performance data, conduct some interviews and ask the client to complete some assessments/questionnaires.

The coach will provide feedback and help the client to create a professional development plan.

### **Phase Three —Coach**

During this phase the actual coaching process begins.

Depending on requirements this can be a mixture of face to face, telephone and email sessions.

## **Phase Four**

### **—Evaluate and Follow-up**

During the final phase the coach reports on the client's progress, evaluates the coaching assignment and helps the client to build support structures to maintain new behaviours and relationships.

### **Does Executive Coaching Work?**

In the past ten years, the meteoric rise of executive coaching in organisations must mean that it is having a positive impact upon organisations both large and small.

Eighty-eight percent of European companies report using coaching in some manner.

Moreover, a recent survey of 170 Human Resource professionals determined that more than 50% had set up a coaching programme in the past 18 months (The Hay Group) and a random survey of 248 Human Resource Managers demonstrated that 55% of their organisations use formal coaching as an employee development method (Society of Human Resource Management, 2005).

### **Why is the Use of Executive Coaching Increasing?**

A 2004 study attributes these nine factors as the principle forces driving the increasing use of executive coaching:

1. Rapidly evolving business environment
2. Individual responsibility for development
3. Financial costs of poor performance
4. Popular development strategy
5. Supports other learning
6. Employees request coaching
7. Need for lifelong learning
8. Improves decision-making
9. Targeted, just-in-time development

(Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2004)

We know that there is a boom within the Executive Coaching industry, but does it work? In many companies the tracking of coaching outlay and the return on investment of coaching programmes has proven to be a monumental task.

Measuring results and returns for all learning and development solutions is always difficult, but it is doubly so with the customisation and uniqueness of coaching itself.

At the end of the day a lot of the feedback as to whether the coaching has worked or not has to be gathered from the coachee themselves and the people immediately around them as they will notice the changes in behaviours, attitude, outlook and above all results.

A lot of the organisations that we work for like to have a monetary figure put to the impact of executive coaching so that the sponsor can justify the spend to the finance department and we do work with them to provide this. However, more and more companies are now seeing Executive Coaching as the "right thing to do" and are channelling their energies into getting right programme for their leaders rather than having to worry about justifying it before it even begins!