

Take The Lead With A COACH

By John Yuva

Executive coaching, once considered a termination tool, is now highly valued as a method to successfully transition executives into leadership roles.

For retiring baby boomers, rising through the executive ranks was a process that often took years to achieve. By proving themselves in more challenging roles, a talented executive could hold a senior-level position upon retirement. However, in today's corporate environment where change is constant and turnover is widespread, the systematic, gradual climb to the leadership ranks no longer exists. Rather than a progressive slope, there is, in some cases, a steep learning curve for employees entering management positions. This is where an executive coach can provide value by training a rising star, a newly appointed executive or even an entire executive team in the behavioral skills needed to succeed as leaders.

What about using mentors and consultants as coaches? Mentors continue to be an effective and important aspect of skills development. However, George Hallenbeck, Ph.D., product manager for Lominger International, a Korn/Ferry company based in Minneapolis, says coaching skills seldom come naturally to most managers. "Thus, it helps to bring in someone from the outside who can see things with a fresh set of eyes and bring an objective viewpoint, whether it's correcting

a problem or capitalizing on someone's potential," says Hallenbeck.

Consultants are equally skilled and effective in what they do. However, the primary difference between executive coaches and consultants, says Ken De Meuse, Ph.D., associate vice president of research for Lominger International, is that consultants are brought in to coordinate and solve business-to-business processes, such as implementing a global technology solution or providing expertise during a





merger or acquisition. Executive coaching is specific to the business-to-behavioral issues that executives face when leading a business unit or a team of employees.

Executive Coaching Evolves

While executive coaching is not a new concept in the corporate environment, its function has changed significantly since the 1980s. Two decades ago, executive coaches were often called upon when a management employee was derailing. The coach

would attempt to correct any unacceptable behavior (for example, brash management style) as a last-ditch effort to retain the employee or as a means to better the employee before ushering him or her out of the organization. Merrill C. Anderson, Ph.D., principal and CEO for Cylient in Johnston, Iowa, and co-author of the book *Coaching That Counts*, says the phrase “coaching out of the organization” was prevalent in the late 1980s and early 1990s. “If you were getting coached, it probably

meant that you were about to go out the door,” he says. “Thus, initially, there was a negative association with coaching.”

Because executive coaching was a major investment, organizations wisely decided to reallocate such a resource toward strengthening executives who added value to the enterprise and were part of its long-term strategy. Dianna Anderson, MCC, principal and vice president of leadership coaching for Cylient and co-author of *Coaching That Counts*, says by

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the mid-1990s, executive coaching started to evolve more into leadership coaching. “Individual coaching became available for not just the most senior executives, but employees throughout the organization who were in a management role,” says Anderson. “It started to expand at the senior level toward involving employees with high leadership potential and connecting coaching with other development activities such as training.”

While executive coaching is now common in business, it may be more applicable than ever in today’s corporate environment.

Bridging The Gap

Organizations are well aware of the generational challenges facing them over the next several years — whether it’s dealing with the impending labor shortage or operating efficiently with four generations sharing work space. Equally challenging is how leaders will adapt to this changing environment. Merrill C. Anderson says the leadership style of command and control has evolved into a more consultative approach. “Organizations are becoming flatter, and this has really altered the relationship that leaders have with people in their respective organizations,” he says. “Leaders are not only being coached, but also becoming coaches. Incorporating the coaching approaches in the moment as they talk and interact with others through the course of the day is certainly an expectation that people have for them, and I think even a requirement for how they are going to be successful.”

How important is adapting coaching approaches throughout the organization? De Meuse says the labor shortage is turning the system of “climbing the ranks” on its head. “With the shrinking labor market and retiring baby boomers, not only are there more open senior-level positions, but there is not nearly as much time to develop the required skills for those positions,” explains De Meuse. “And because organizations must bypass some of those important developmental experiences, a coach is brought in to fill those gaps.”

Individual Approach To Coaching

Executive coaches use a variety of approaches to gain a well-rounded perspective of clients. Their assessment is a central part of coaching and a major contributor to the success of the coaching engagement. For many years, executive coaching occurred between a coach and an individual. While individual coaching continues to be a major offering of executive coaching firms, new approaches have emerged. De Meuse and Hallenbeck describe two methods for working with individual executives.

says De Meuse.

Hallenbeck says the results of the assessment are compiled in a feedback report. “This report provides insights into the commonalities that exist between the executive and his or her constituencies,” he says. “Thus, we’re not only examining the report for common strengths but common needs for development, as well.” At that point, an action plan is developed whereby the executive and coach start to address specific areas from the report findings.

Individual coaching provides an

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Multiple coaches. Most individual coaching engagements involve a coach-to-individual relationship; however, Korn/Ferry’s specialist team coaching gives an individual an opportunity to explore different leadership areas (such as resilience, influence, authenticity and the like) with coaches who specialize in those arenas. De Meuse says that over the course of a few days, the executive will meet with each coach individually, and focus on specific leadership attributes based on the executive’s needs. Once the face-to-face engagement is complete, the executive continues communicating with his or her coaches via phone or e-mail for guidance and follow-ups.

360-degree assessment. This approach to coaching involves conducting the engagement at the executive’s office, and including his or her peers as part of the process. De Meuse explains that a survey evaluation is completed by the executive’s manager, direct reports and office peers. “The purpose of the 360-degree assessment is to have people throughout the organization that work with the executive assess him or her and provide feedback to gauge how the executive is viewed by different constituencies in the organization,”

executive with not only the ability to gain deeper insights in various business settings, but also to apply coaching principles throughout his or her organization. Within the last several years, leadership team coaching has become more prevalent. Rather than assessing an individual, an executive coach works with members on the individual level as well as a collective group to enhance its performance.

Coaching The Team

Organizations are undergoing major internal changes. Whether it’s adapting to generational challenges, gaining buy-in for an organization-wide initiative or moving a cross-functional team toward its goal, behavioral change is seldom simple. Merrill C. Anderson says there are different definitions for team coaching. “For us it’s really examining the team and all the team dynamics, and then linking those with the individual, team member dynamics,” he says.

One of the benefits of team coaching, according to Dianna Anderson, is that as a coach, you continue to support leaders in successfully applying new ways of working over a period of time so that coaching really becomes engrained in their leadership style

and in their collective work together. She adds that team coaching is most effective when an alignment exists between the team's focus and attaining the corresponding business outcomes. "This is critical because in order to attain the goal the team has set, they need to go through some kind of personal and team development to achieve it," she says.

Team alignment is the key impetus for team coaching for Howard M. Guttman, principal for Guttman Development Strategies, Inc., in Mt. Arlington, New Jersey, and author of the book *Great Business Teams: Cracking the Code*. His company conducts alignments of senior executive teams and says when you align

- A reassessment occurs six months later to gauge how the team is tracking.

"With a team alignment there's limited time to drill down to the individual level because the focus is on the team dynamic," says Guttman. "However, once the alignment is complete, the interim coaching component begins where quality time is spent with individual team members to support them through the behavioral change."

Obviously, bringing in an executive coach for either an individual or team engagement requires a monetary and time investment. Thus, the stakeholders involved must have clear ideas as to why a coach is being brought in, what they expect to gain

or someone's perception of how well it worked," says De Meuse. "By definition, ROI should be rooted in some type of financial return."

According to Merrill C. Anderson, who specializes in coaching evaluations, measuring the ROI of leadership coaching involves providing a platform for the leaders to tell their story of how they applied what they've learned from the coaching experience and how those behaviors created value. "When we talk about value creation, it's in terms of intangible value, such as improved decision-making, improved team building or increased employee engagement," explains Anderson. "We also examine more tangible expressions of value by linking back to the objectives of the coaching engagement as well as the business objectives the initiative was in support of achieving, such as increased productivity, cost reduction or increased net revenue."

He adds that evaluations are usually conducted four to five months following the coaching engagement. This provides enough time for executives to apply what they have learned and for business results to emerge and be identified. However, Anderson says it's very important that leaders not be focused on solving everyone's problems. If executives become accustomed to having conversations and gathering information from people in order to make a decision that solves their problems, their role as a leader becomes diminished.

"Everyone has their knots, but by applying coaching approaches, leaders can help people develop their own ability to gain insights into situations and develop their own solutions — essentially untying their knot and advancing their ability to solve problems," says Anderson. With supply management professionals interacting with a variety of business units, suppliers and customers, and learning more about themselves and others through coaching, they have the potential to enhance executives' ability to influence stakeholders and build credibility throughout the supply chain. **ISM**

John Yuva is a senior writer for *Inside Supply Management*®. For more information, send an e-mail to author@ism.ws.

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a team it's about moving the team ahead and deciding what role everyone will play. He breaks the process down into the following steps:

- An overview meeting takes place to understand the need for team alignment.
- Individual team members are interviewed to benchmark them against a high-performing team.
- The members are brought together as a team to begin the initial alignment (goals are built around the group's concurrent state and what's required to be a high-performing team).
- Structured engagement occurs on the key issues with agreements created in terms of accountabilities, interdependencies, protocols, messaging to the next level and finally reaching a level of high performance.
- An interim coach meets with individual team members during the initiative once per month for six months to one year (between reassessment intervals).

from the process and how they are going to account for that, states Hallenbeck. There are many questions, such as who should play a role in the process, what type of methodology and practices will be used, and what criteria will be employed to select a coach, that need to be answered prior to setting up a coaching engagement. "The first time organizations venture into a coaching initiative, it's likely they will need to adjust some of their expectations and approaches as they go through it," he says. "You get the most out of executive coaching when you plan it out, think through it, measure your results and make adjustments."

Measuring The Results

Measuring the ROI of an executive coaching engagement involves analyzing a variety of factors. De Meuse says organizations are doing a poor job of evaluating the ROI of coaching. "Some companies are saying they're measuring the ROI but it's nothing more than one person's opinion