

Selecting the Right Coach
by Howard J. Morgan

Executive coaching is a precision tool for optimizing the capabilities of leaders. Most often, the focus of that coaching is on the leader's individual effectiveness. In other cases, the coaching is directed more at the leader's effectiveness within a vital team environment, or on his or her capacity to drive organizational change. Regardless of where coaching occurs on the leadership spectrum, the executive coach works in close, trusted partnership with the leader, applying experience, know-how, and insight to key areas, judiciously pushing that individual beyond his or her comfort zone to reach levels of performance greater than would have been achieved alone, all within an accelerated time frame.

If that sounds like a tall order, it should. Top executive coaches are well paid. As such, the organization hiring a coach makes a significant financial investment, not to mention an investment of resources, energy and focus. Coachees are almost always key individuals whose performance levels have a major impact on the ongoing performance of others. The coach who has been selected to work with that leader must be able to help him or her achieve superior results within the context of the organization's business goals, or the investment will have been a poor one.

Despite this imperative, the coach selection process does not always receive the attention it deserves. In part, this is due to a lack of clarity around what coaching should accomplish and how. Though a powerful idea, coaching in 2003 threatens to become a watered-down term as its range broadens to accommodate new approaches and demands. Is coaching limited to achieving business objectives and higher levels of performance or does it extend into areas of personal satisfaction and achievement? Is coaching just for individual performance or can it drive team and organizational performance as well? Is it dedicated to specific objectives from the beginning or does it

take on whatever new challenges arise? Does the engagement take place within a set period of time or does it go on indefinitely, with no clear end, as an extended partnership or coach-for-life approach?

A spectrum definitely exists – and we will define our perspective on the optimal boundaries of that spectrum over the course of this book. But, as the number of practitioners joining the coaching industry continues to explode, the inherent looseness within the coaching discipline has the potential to create confusion and dissatisfaction among consumers. How does the consumer know what is needed and whether a particular coach can fill that need efficiently? Despite the rise of accreditation and certification programs, it can be difficult to validate whether a coach's expertise and skill are sufficient to meet the challenges the organization or leader is facing. The best coaches, we have found, come from a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences and points of view, even while they share a narrower range of talents and approaches which seem more inherent than trainable. Without knowing who the best are, how does an organization select? It goes without saying that organizations in 2003 have a greatly reduced capacity to entertain the distraction and expense of outside interventions that don't accomplish the job.

From a more positive angle, the head count of effective and dedicated coaches working today is greater than ever before. As leaders face increasingly complex interpersonal, strategic and organizational issues, more and better coaches are available to help advance their cause. The current success of coaching as an industry demonstrates the need at top management levels for outside expertise, free from personal agenda. The ongoing success of coaching will depend on how well its practitioners continue to define, structure and deliver their services in the future.

One of the aims of this book is to create more clarity around what coaching does to meet the demands of today's leaders, not from a theoretical vantage point, but by

analyzing how top coaches actually practice their art. By doing so, we hope that clients and coaches will be better educated to know when coaching is the right choice, what goals it can achieve and what skills, attitudes and backgrounds enable a particular coach to produce success.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the considerations, steps and questions a client should be mindful of when choosing a coach. To cover those issues, we will, in Part I, look at what a coach does and what common attributes, skills and orientations are common to successful coaching. We will then, in Part II, look at those factors which drive the decision to hire a coach and the criteria that needs to be in place to ensure a superior return on investment. Finally, in Part III, we look at how to ensure fit between the coach and the organization's needs.

Part I: What Is Coaching

The Orientation of Coaching in 2003

Coaching is not for problems anymore. Ten years ago, coaching was primarily focused on people with performance issues. A coach was brought on board because a leader's personal style had a negative impact on peers and reports, or his or her skill set was inadequate – conditions that were leading to career derailment. Sometimes the coach served as a bullet-proof means of communicating bad news about poor performance in advance of dismissal. Coaching was often viewed pejoratively as something applied to failing leaders or in a last ditch effort to salvage a career in which the organization had made a long-term investment it didn't want to throw away.

Today, that impression has turned one hundred and eighty degrees. As the marketplace has become increasingly competitive and fast-moving, organizations recognize that they must work with speed and precision in enabling key people to

achieve critical business objectives. In response, coaching has embraced a whole new focus: how to take good people and make them the best they can be, positioning them to work more effectively and cohesively in their environments, thereby optimizing their capabilities and impact.

In other words, coaching is now most often applied to top performers whose leadership and growth potential is highly valued by the organization. Of course, performance issues will always be encountered in any development plan or in the dynamics a leader must work through when trying to execute strategy or change. But coaching is not intended to hone in on those issues any more than is absolutely necessary. The orientation is always forward moving with a focus on efficiency, effectiveness and impact. In the process, the personal and interpersonal challenges a coach will encounter are no less complex than they were years ago, but the coach and coachee now work together with a different kind of urgency and creative energy to discover optimal solutions with the organization's objectives in mind.

Selecting the right coach is a challenge. Coaching is an approach, a viewpoint and a technique, as much as it is a profession. There are no defined sets of skills or backgrounds for coaches just as there are no defined sets of problems or challenges. The coach is a highly individualized resource of knowledge, expertise, intuition and experience. What he or she brings to the table is a dynamic ability to deal with a dynamic challenge. While this dynamic character makes coaching difficult to codify, it also ensures that a good coach with the right expertise can work with the coachee to find a path to success. That path may differ from coach to coach, but the impact can be just as positive.

What Coaching Isn't

As a means of defining what coaching is, it can help to examine what it isn't. Coaching differs, for example, from consulting. Although a consultant and a coach both have a body of research or theory to draw upon when attacking a problem, the coach rarely brings a model or framework into the engagement. As outsiders, neither coach nor consultant are likely to understand the client's business environment as well as the client does, but while the consultant provides ready-made answers to solve those issues, the coach's advice is extremely customized. Both consultant and coach also rely on data gathering to interpret the organization's or individual's challenges, but while the consultant uses that data to prepare a path for others to follow, the coach uses it to help build the critical capabilities of key people. Unlike the consultant, the coach works in partnership with the client to discover solutions together, drawing them forth through careful listening, provocative questioning, enlightened guidance and the right level of prompting at the right time. To a great degree, the coach's goal is to enable the client to find the right answers by him or herself.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a successful coach-client relationship is based on the highest levels of trust and openness. Nevertheless, boundaries do exist. While it is true that coaching may sometimes feel, at least facetiously, as though it functions somewhere between the couch and the confessional, it is not therapy. The orientation is very different. Depending on personal background and skill, the coach may indeed use some of the listening and analytic tools of therapy to build connection, trust and openness. But while personal issues or deeper problems are likely to be encountered in the course of working together, the coach is not meant, and usually not qualified, to provide more than supportive, confidential advice in those matters. Should serious personal issues emerge, a coach may be well positioned to provide a referral to a psychologist, counselor or medical doctor. But, in as much as it is healthy to do so, the

coach maintains the focus of the engagement on moving the client forward in line with business objectives. While the client may be in control of the pace and direction of a therapy session, the coach is being paid to facilitate the pace and direction of the coaching engagement in the service of specific business goals.

Nor, despite the coach's close working relationship with the client, is the coach a substitute colleague or fellow executive. Many coaches have been successful in business in at least a few incarnations, usually at the most senior levels. This provides the coach with a sense of comfort and familiarity with the client's world, allowing him or her to communicate in the same language. It also provides key insights into the complex and competing pressures of the client's work environment, and enables the coach to recognize a business opportunity or roadblock when encountered. However, the skills and interests that make the coach successful in coaching would probably not lead to success as a full-fledged member of the organization. If the coach were on board permanently the orientation towards questioning, pushing the envelope, prompting alternative answers, and closely managing the personal dynamic might very well cause the welcome to be worn out before long. The coach's stay in the organization is meant to be a short one, almost always under two years in duration, and longer only if intermittent challenges are pursued in a way that builds on the foundation of trust and insight already established. A best practice coach, by design and ethic, is not in the business of creating a dependant relationship. While this may be a sensible business model akin to logging billable hours at a law firm, it violates one of the principle ethics of coaching: do everything in the service of the client, not in the service of oneself.

Skills & Attributes of Best Practice Coaches

The act of coaching takes place across a broad spectrum of areas, challenges and situations. By its very nature, coaching is a flexible, adaptable and fluid means of

achieving desired change and measurable results. So what are the skills and attributes that make for successful coaching? Chemistry, expertise and experience are all very important – and we will define those in more detail shortly. But the following list might help distinguish what it means to be best practice.

Technical Skills

A best practice coach is able to quickly:

- set the stage for the coaching engagement by establishing ground rules, reporting lines, confidentiality and trust
- assess the current situation accurately and fully
- achieve alignment and agreement (with the coachee / client and key stakeholders) around critical needs and achievable objectives
- develop and execute an approach that will lead to a successful outcome
- recognize emerging problems and opportunities in advance and adjust the plan accordingly
- provide follow-up, to whatever degree necessary, to ensure sustainability

Experience & Background

A best practice coach has:

- a good working knowledge of the industry and kind of organization the client is working in
- a deep understanding of the coachee's level within the organization and the associated pressures, responsibilities and relationships
- a keen knowledge of where the coach's expertise starts and stops and how that will match the client's needs
- the insight to judge whether the client is serious about working toward the kind of change, development or direction the coach is able to drive

- the ability and resolve to assess personal fit and go forward or part ways accordingly
- the structure and discipline to manage the coaching relationship to the needs of the individual, whether the individual fully recognizes those needs or not
- the ability to distill a great deal of information while recognizing important patterns and uncovering key nuggets
- the ability to distinguish between matters of short-term urgency and long-term significance
- the ethics to maintain strict personal and business confidentiality

Coaching Attributes

A best practice coach is able to:

- put the coachee's needs ahead of the coach's own ego
- listen with nuance and sensitivity
- establish the highest levels of trust, openness and personal connection
- ask probing questions that draw forth information the coachee could never have arrived at independently despite superior knowledge and experience
- understand the coachee's relationships with the insight of a participant-observer
- make intuitive leaps based on data that will lead the coachee to new levels of performance
- judge actions or words to calibrate whether development is occurring at the appropriate rate and direction
- manage the coaching dynamic to the ever-shifting mood, attitude and will of the coachee

- back away from an area or direction that is not in the coachee's best interest or one that he or she is highly resistant to working on
- change the coachee's behavior gradually but steadily even in the coach's absence
- push the coachee to new levels without putting him or her in a position that would lead to compromise or embarrassment or otherwise decrease the desire and willingness to change
- create an independent capability in the coachee by building that person's strengths instead of building reliance on the coach

Given this complex matrix of skills, attributes and capabilities, it might seem as though a best practice coach is born, not made. The hard truth, however, is that every coach learns through doing. The coach often begins his or her calling because of a passionate desire to take a leadership roll in a particular area of expertise or interest. This passion carries the coach through a sometimes painful growth of skills and abilities in the service of his or her calling. A coach is always learning, growing and developing key behaviors as required. Each of the best practice coaches we interviewed spoke of a two-way dynamic in coaching relationships, frequently described as teaching that flows in both directions, the coach providing insight to the client even as the client does the same for the coach.

A coach, like a leader, can be grown if the originating passion is present. But this is a personal journey more than an educational attainment. Coaching accreditation programs probably can't teach the art of coaching any more than golf instruction can teach the art of golf. Skills can be learned and techniques replicated, but true understanding only comes from carefully honed practice in real-world situations.

We recognize that there are different levels of capabilities in the coaching universe, just as there are different categories. Higher levels can be attained over time, given limitations of experience, innovative capability and personal growth. The thought leaders profiled in this book are widely recognized as belonging among the top coaches working today. Each of them has been practicing for many years. Other coaches can learn from them, not to attain a higher level of mastery tomorrow, but to become a touch better each day.

Areas of Coaching Expertise

Another problem with coaching, as the concept is commonly defined, is that it describes the mode of the working relationship without differentiating the variety of aims and objectives.

In general, in this book, we are talking about business or executive coaching. The distinction is most clear when compared to coaching that helps an individual achieve a personal aim such as happiness, work-life balance, wealth or better relationships. There are several distinct exceptions to this, and many coaches speak of the continuum between business and personal life encountered during any engagement; but, for the most part, executive or leadership coaching occurs within the context of organizational needs.

Within that domain, we have found it helpful to make further differentiations. The following five categories seemed to provide adequate "boxes" for all of the coaches that were interviewed. A qualification is necessary, however. Some coaches were very firmly members of their particular box. Others recognized that while they belonged mainly to one space, there were aspects of their coaching which occasionally crossed over.

Coaching Leaders

Coaching leaders is the largest and most inclusive category. Typically, the focus of such coaching is on the leader's behaviors, style, vision or practice. The coach works with the coachee to understand and optimize his or her effectiveness in key relationships.

Coaching for Leadership Development

Leadership development coaches work to instill a capability in the leader or leadership team that brings the organization to another level of effectiveness. In some cases, this means providing the leader with his or her own coaching capability.

Career / Life / Transitions Coaching

All coaching involves change, but coaching for transitions focuses on change that is a part of distinct shifts in level or circumstance. Some coaches work on guiding a leader or leadership team through a major organizational shift such as occurs during a merger or acquisition. Others work at optimizing a leader's capabilities as required by a new level of responsibility. Still others help define the career options for an individual who is seeking a new position, level of responsibility, environment or role.

Coaching for Strategy

Coaching for strategy, because it is more organizationally focused, can cover a broad range of challenges. Primarily, it is focused on coaching a leader or leadership team to understand its emerging competitive landscape in order to dominate that future space, five to seven years down the road. Hard core analysis, development and deployment of strategy and implementation of organizational change are all aspects of strategy coaching. As a result, the coach must be able to guide the leader through the important stages of the journey. This means that coaching for personal effectiveness,

leadership behaviors, team building and driving organizational change can all be important to the engagement.

Coaching for Organizational Change

To some degree, coaching for organizational change is another catch-all category, defined more by its variety than any unifying approach. However, each of the coaches interviewed were focused on the leader's ability to steer the organization through a period of change or to a distinctly different level of capability. Some coaches, for example, were focused on developing the organization's capacity to innovate, others on the capacity of the leadership team to guide the organization through crisis and uncertainty. In any case, coaching for leadership behaviors, competitive strategy, team building and change were common ideas acknowledged by each coach.

When making a coach selection decision, it can be helpful to think in terms of these four categories. It is common sense that one should understand the imperative for coaching before determining how to fill that need. Nevertheless, a framework for considering available options can create greater clarity around that need and help define expectations for all involved.

Part II: The Mechanics of Selection

Who Should Make The Coach Selection Decision

To establish the foundation for a successful coaching engagement, the ground rules and objectives must be clear. When it comes to who should make the coach selection decision, the issues can be broken down into three areas of concern.

Who is Paying for the Coach and Why

Nearly one hundred percent of the time, the organization is paying for the coach. If so, then the organization must "own" the coach selection decision. In other words, a coach is being hired because there is an organizational need for the coachee to improve his or her performance. That organizational need must be front and center throughout the engagement. Allowing the coach selection decision to be ceded to someone who doesn't have the organization's clear objectives in mind is a mistake.

Choices of coach can be presented to all concerned. The coachee must feel reasonably comfortable with those choices. But the client should be the ultimate decision-maker.

Who is the client

In terms of defining who the client is, a gray area may exist between who is being coached and who is paying for the coach's services. To some degree this ambiguity is inherent to the confidentiality and trust imbued in the coaching relationship. A vocal minority of coaches is very clear on the fact that the coachee is their client. While the organization is paying for their services, and the achievement of organizational goals is the ultimate objective, the relationship between coach and coachee is akin to a doctor-patient or lawyer-client one.

The main concern in this approach seems to be confidentiality and trust. Other coaches, perhaps the majority, are equally clear that while coach-coachee trust and confidence is inviolable, the coach is being hired in service of the organization. Having clarity in that relationship actually helps move the ball along. The coachee knows that his or her agenda must be aligned with the organizational agenda, and that success or failure will be measured on those terms. During times of disagreement, the organization's wishes are paramount. If the coachee were to believe that he or she was the client and in control, a very different dynamic might result.

The actual client is almost always the coachee's superior. In those frequent cases when the CEO is the coachee, the client and the coachee may be one. Regardless of who the client is, the coach is always working to the best of his or her abilities for the betterment of the coachee.

What is the role of Human Resources

Frequently, human resources is given the opportunity to provide a list of appropriate coaches. While this can become tantamount to actually selecting the coach, it should not. Human resources, with its insight into organizational and behavioral change, and to the extent that it is involved in executive development, succession planning and even organizational strategy, may be extremely well informed about an individual leader's needs. But the selection decision should remain with the client, because the client is most affected by the payoff or lack thereof from hiring the coach.

Nor should HR allow the coachee the opportunity to select a preferred coach among three or four choices. In such cases, the coachee will typically make their choice based on personal criteria, likes and dislikes, connection or chemistry, sometimes even seeing a particular coach as a stronger advocate for their career. Rarely will this help the coachee push into uncomfortable areas or make desired performance improvements or developments.

When it comes to reporting relationships, a discussion covered in the next chapter, it should be noted that HR needs to step aside from this dynamic as well. If they are closely involved in the selection process and also involved in "checking up" or reviewing the progress of the engagement, there are a number of risks. First, they may be viewed as the de facto client. Second, their personal views about the coachee's and client's needs and objectives may overly influence the belief structure of the coach.

The coach should be empowered to set the ground rules regarding client and coachee, clarify reporting relationships, and work to align the coachee's challenges with the client's or manager's objectives. All of these issues will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Why Is A Coach Being Hired

As the paying client, the organization needs to be clear about why a coach is being hired to work with the coachee. What is the root cause of the decision to hire a coach? Is it positive or negative? Is it obvious on the surface (i.e., is there a clear goal in mind), or are there unstated reasons related to politics, performance issues or interpersonal dynamics? The reasons for hiring can usually be broken down into two distinct areas: performance correction and performance development. Both influence the cost, time and energy the organization should be willing to invest in the coaching engagement.

Performance Correction

How valuable is the coachee to the organization? What is the cost of replacing that person versus "fixing" the problem? Would the organization be able to move faster and more efficiently without that person or do their other contributions make the effort, expense and time of coaching worthwhile? Will performance levels of colleagues and reports improve if that person's performance improves or will they improve at greater rates if that person is no longer in the organization? When performance correction is the reason for coaching, there is nothing wrong with the organization thinking in such blunt terms. In fact, clarity in those matters can ease or guide the decisions that occur along the way, for everyone involved.

It is human nature to avoid dealing with unpleasant or uncomfortable issues, particularly at senior levels when collegiality, territorial politics and personal history can

create a great deal of willful ambiguity. Organizations have clear mandates to deal with the most egregious performance correction issues, such as sexual harassment, anger management, etc. But, in gray areas, it's not uncommon for an external coach to be engaged as a substitute for the manager's own leadership duties. Sometimes, a coach is actually being hired as a kinder, gentler way of transitioning the coachee to a life outside of the organization – a very expensive mode of outplacement.

The client needs to consider some critical issues. Is coaching going to help this problem? What's the probability of success, and what's the payoff for success? When these variables are matrixed against the cost of the coach and the cost to the organization's resources and capabilities, the answer should be clear.

Performance Development

Because of the cost and investment required to hire a coach, organizations today more often focus their external coaching budget on valued leaders whose contributions are considered critical. The question whether to hire a coach or not, however, is still one of cost benefit. The organization must answer some key questions. Who is worth coaching? What areas of skill or capability development are important enough to warrant coaching? What direction does the organization want to move in and does its current leadership have the potential to develop the requisite capabilities? What is the end result that is desired?

Despite the economic downturn since 2001, the competition for talented performers continues to skyrocket. Such people have unlimited options. What is the cost to the organization in providing or in not providing growth opportunities? If that star performer's capabilities are improved by 25% through coaching, will there be a place within the organization for that individual to perform at those higher levels? If not, the

investment will likely have been wasted, painfully so if the individual moves to a competitor.

Coaching for performance development is almost always applied in advance of (preferably) or slightly after (more often) a change in circumstance. The coach's role is to provide objective, continual advice to that person on how to position themselves most effectively within their environment. The following list can provide some concrete examples of when coaching can help with performance development. Specifically, coaching applies when the individual leader is:

- taking on a new role or rising in level within the organization
- slated for development because they have been identified as high potential or someone who fits in the succession management process
- expanding the scope of their responsibilities to include new challenges, e.g., an increase in geographic, multinational or cross cultural territory, or the rolling in of other divisions or departments
- charged with driving some kind of organizational change or strategy critical to organizational success
- working with senior team members in a new way that requires external counsel, advice and support
- in need of optimizing their capabilities to improve the performance of others
- in need of developing critical interpersonal skills in order to work better in a non-technical, leadership role
- in need of help in presenting, developing and articulating a message, vision, plan or strategy
- in need of counsel, advice, or critical thinking from an outside perspective to reconfigure the organization's direction, structure or capabilities

What Results Are Wanted From the Coaching Engagement

Just as the organization's objectives should be clear, so should the desired results. In the case of performance correction, the cost of coaching should be no more than the cost of replacement. In the case of performance development, the cost should be considered an investment that sees a greater return through the coachee's new level of contribution.

As much as possible, measuring return on investment should be done in dollars and impact. This is one of the most challenging aspects of coaching for almost all of the coaches we surveyed. When goals are clear from the outset, success can be judged by whether those goals are met. But goals often evolve throughout the course of the engagement, or the impact of coaching may be intangible, or the foundation is being laid for impact that will transpire in the future. Satisfaction of coachee and client is one measure of success, but does it gauge the sustainability or long-term success of the impact or merely measure the success of the relationship?

Part III: Ensuring Fit

Once the decision to hire a coach has been made, how does the client judge whether a particular coach will be a good fit for the coachee and the organizational needs? It is necessary to consider the appropriateness of the coach in terms of background, ability, organizational fit and human chemistry to increase the likelihood of success.

Values Alignment

Although values alignment is rarely considered, a mismatch in value set can lead to failure. The coach's values, demonstrated in his or her approach, methods, and

personal philosophy must be a good match for the organization. A hard-driving organization that values internal competition over team harmony, for instance, would not be well-served by a coach who is driven to increasing effectiveness by improving interpersonal relations. A short-term profits oriented organization might be out of line with a coach whose work is most effective at instilling long-range capabilities. Stark contrasts in those points of view will lead to conflict between coach and client and will result in a poor return on investment. It might even place the coachee in some degree of career jeopardy.

Wisdom, Insight and Intuitive Leaps

Has the coach walked a mile in the coachee's shoes? The coach must be able to understand the challenges of the person being coached. Ideally, the coach has had direct, personal experience that relates to the coachee's current concerns and needs. Quite often, coaches who advise senior leaders have been senior leaders themselves, or have worked so closely with such people that familiarity is very high. It shouldn't be assumed, however, that because a coach works well with senior leaders that ability transfers automatically to more junior levels. Pressures, responsibilities, challenges and opportunities can be very different.

Experience provides the coach with credibility. The coach should know how to present him or herself in a way so that messages can be heard and understood. It doesn't matter how wonderful the advice or counsel is, if the coach does not project credibility the message will not have the desired impact.

Technical knowledge or expertise can also matter but is not nearly as important as one might think. The coach, to a certain extent, can actually be well-served by a lack of direct technical knowledge. This forces the coachee to articulate issues in greater detail, and opens the door for the fresh perspective of a newcomer. Regardless of the

level of technical experience and understanding, the coach's questioning and insight needs to add value to the situation. If suggestions and questions are inappropriate or unhelpful, frustration will build.

But, the expectations for the value that coaches provide should be even higher than that. Best practice coaches absorb information about the organization, the individual, the technical concerns and the objectives not just to appropriately steer the coachee, but also to bring him or her to entirely new levels of performance. The coach does so by making intuitive leaps. He or she has an ability to see patterns and connect the dots in ways that the individual could never manage alone.

Evaluating the coach's experience, wisdom and intuitive capabilities is no easy feat. One method of doing so is to ask concrete, behavior-based questions about past coaching engagements.

What Are The Coach's Other Dealings In The Industry

Just as the network of senior leaders and board members is a tangled web, so the network of best practice coaches may extend beyond the client's organization to competitor organizations. The client can be excused for asking the question, can the coach serve two masters?

Confidentiality is not the issue. Coaches have strong personal ethics when it comes to confidentiality and would damage their reputations if that were ever violated. Nevertheless, clients should consider how the coach's other dealings in the industry may affect the guidance being given. Can the coach be a committed partner in success? That's a judgment that can only be made based on the individuals involved.

On the other hand, many coaches that we surveyed did frequently find themselves in exactly this scenario – and declared it to be a benefit rather than a detriment to their ability to provide service. A knowledge of the industry, the competitive

landscape, the innovations taking place and overall best practices is a resource to the client in terms of crafting solutions unique to his or her circumstance. The essence of coaching is customized help. Whereas a consulting organization might provide the same plug-and-play advice even to direct competitors, the coach is working in partnership with the client to discover unique solutions together.

Can the Coach Operate Effectively With More Than One Coachee In The Same Organization

Quite often, the success of a coaching engagement with one leader in an organization will lead to the coach being retained by another leader in the same organization. The quality of results and impact can lead the coach to be passed around like an exciting new book that one simply has to read. In particular, if the coach has worked with a senior leader or CEO, it might be considered important for others to become "schooled" as well.

Each individual coach knows whether he or she can operate effectively with multiple leaders or when tasked at different levels within the organization. Some coaches see that as a desired state because they are able to work most effectively at driving change, strategy, effectiveness or team work when they become a roving coach. Some clients and coachee's may view this with alarm when they consider possible breaches of trust and confidentiality. Certainly, trust and confidentiality are at issue, but problems can be avoided if the ground rules are clear and followed openly. In some organizations, the mandate for development is so insistent and clear that coaches will be working openly with superiors, colleagues and reports to drive performance improvements. The organization needs to determine what is acceptable for its culture and direction.

Human Chemistry

Coaching is a partnership which thrives on trust, confidence and forward progress. Coaches and coachees often develop a very strong relationship, even a strong friendship, during the course of working together. Best practice coaches are able to inspire that foundation from the very first stages of the engagement.

Nevertheless, a coachee will not obtain a great deal of benefit from someone they feel negatively towards or, conversely, someone they like a great deal who is unwilling or unable to push them in the right direction. Personal likes and dislikes shouldn't be prime factors, but coaching will not be successful if the coachee is highly resistant to the coach. Where's the balance?

The client must make that decision by weighing all factors. For example, if the coachee is uncomfortable with assertive people but needs to develop more assertive behavior, a coach with a dominant and hard-driving personality may be the ticket. If a coachee is from the old school and does not respect the contributions of female reports, then a determined female coach may rearrange their world view. There are times when likes and dislikes, personal preferences, comfort levels and biases should be ignored.

Best practice coaches develop the human chemistry needed for success. By the end of any successful coaching relationship, the bond between coach and coachee will be present.

Coaching Checklist Selecting The Right Coach

- Are you looking for a long-term or short-term coach?
- What are the characteristics of the coach that will have the greatest impact on success?
- What style of coach will be most effective?
- Has the coach had enough “real” experience at this level?
- Has the coach the appropriate experience in the type of coaching that is required?
- What is the level of knowledge that the coach has in your industry?
- Does the coach have the skills that you think are important for success?
- Are you looking for a coach to enhance or adjust the performance of the individual or team?
- Are you using coaching appropriately—or using it as an alternative for dealing with the problem?
- Can the coach command the respect of the coachee?
- Can the coach relate to the coachee?
- Can the coach manage the relationship effectively?
- Is the coach building capacity in the coachee(s) or building dependence on them?
- Is there a benefit or risk in the coach working with more than one person in the organization?