

Using Coaching in Extension

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This NebGuide provides an introduction to the characteristics and process of coaching.

Introduction

The concept of executive and personal coaching surfaced in the business world in the late 1980s and has gained momentum to the point now it is becoming a popular strategic movement promoting change.

Today, there are over 2,000 executive and personal coaches, with numbers expected to rise over 5,000 in the next few years. Yet, as the field grows, it is apparent, as with any new movement, there is still some ambiguity surrounding the definition and methodology of executive coaching. For example, the skills and process of coaching remain somewhat undefined. This NebGuide provides an introduction to the underpinnings of coaching. It will focus on the characteristics and process of coaching.

Coaching is founded on the philosophy that knowledge and character start from within the person and develop outward. Coaching focuses on transforming people intrapersonally in order to build positive external behaviors. There are different forms of coaching: directive and nondirective. The definition of the traditional coach, also referred to as a *directive coach*, is a coach who does the telling, and changes occur from the coach's perspective (Bacon, 2003). Some refer to this as training, teaching, parenting or sports coaching. *Nondirective coaching*, on the other hand, is more prevalent and considered more effective because the relationship between the coach and client is collaborative. It is a supportive relationship in which the coach raises awareness through questioning, and enhances interpersonal and organization effectiveness in the executive that extends to their job, personal life and beyond (Dean & Meyer, 2002). Coaches are described as great listeners and “act as *thought partners*” to their clients (Pfeffer, 2002).

There are several focuses in coaching. *Career coaching* emphasizes career choices, planning, skill develop-

ment, and career enhancement. *Life or personal coaching* is usually defined as a coaching/client relationship in which the partnership works to resolve personal, emotional, behavioral, spiritual, and lifestyle issues. This form of coaching encompasses the broadest spectrum of client focuses and may include some techniques from counseling to assist the client in getting to the root of issues. *Executive coaching* focuses on developing senior-level managers' communication, leadership, and interpersonal skills, as well as life/work balance.

This NebGuide provides some definition for the field of coaching, while also offering some thoughts on how the coaching process may be used.

Do You Have What It Takes to Coach?

- Are you comfortable in the role of a listener and observer?
- Do people believe you set aside your judgments when they talk to you about an issue?
- Do others come to you to discuss their career and life plans?
- Do people believe you are a good sounding board for their decisions?
- Do people believe you are a positive and balanced force?
- Do you have a strong sense of values and act with integrity in both your professional and personal life?
- Do you have strong dialoguing skills?
- Do you build communication and rapport with others around you?
- Are you considered successful in your organization and have strong knowledge of the processes of effective organizations?

If you answered yes to seven of the nine questions, you may possess the characteristics needed to be an effective coach. You may be performing that function now. You might ask a trusted friend or colleague to do the same assessment of you and compare their responses to your self-assessment.

An Example

There is considerable discussion surrounding the positive outcomes the coaching process can have. Flanagan (2004) provided a case of coaching for Novartis, a Canadian company. Flanagan suggested that coaching was used to improve managers' skills to listen, get feedback, build teamwork, refine their roles, and improve organizational communication. The coach and client work together to identify the manager's strengths and weaknesses. At Novartis the coaching program was custom designed to meet the specific needs of each individual client. Ideas, diagnoses and the action plan itself mostly come from the client. Clients work on developing greater self-awareness, giving and receiving feedback, and being authentic. Coaches are also being called into organizations to prevent "derailment" of executives in new positions, improve worker morale, help clients learn how to effectively make and manage decisions, improve teamwork, and increase communication within organizations. Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (2001) cite American Express, American Management Association, AT&T, Citibank, Colgate, Levi Strauss, Northern Telecom, NYNEX Corp and Procter & Gamble as just some examples of companies that have accepted and implemented coaching practices in their organizations.

Characteristics of the Coaching Process

There are several unique characteristics that distinguish the process of personal and executive coaching from other practices in the consulting and leadership fields. Most commonly, the relationship structure is pointed out as the most important difference. Unlike most consulting and leadership practices, in coaching the relationship is considered a collaboration or partnership, in which the client learns to use his/her insight to make wise decisions for themselves. Coaches assist managers, executives or employees by guiding them to achieve balance between their own personal transformations and succeeding in the professional area. Coaches provide insight and guidance in the development of the client's decision making skills. A coach offers an environment in which the client is ensured confidentiality on all issues; therefore, trust and listening are the core of the coaching process. The skill of structured dialogue is the coach's method of getting to the important issues. Decisions are based on the client's direction, not the coach's perception.

Why Is Coaching Important?

Coaches work with clients to build on their strengths, improve performance and enhance quality of life (Dean and Meyer, 2002). At times, organizations will assign a coach to assist managers or executives through a transition of a new promotion or an organizational transition. Coaches can also identify effective behaviors and help the client establish more effective team communication. They help clients clarify performance goals as well as expectations and roles within

the organization. Coaching has become a strategy businesses are using to increase performance results while empowering the client to gain self-sustaining leadership and interpersonal skills. It is a customized approach to individual transformation in which the coach helps the client re-evaluate his/her relationships, use of power, responsibility, learning, and leadership strategies.

The Stages of Coaching

Flaherty (1999) suggests there are several important stages in the coaching process.

Stage 1: Establishing the Coaching Relationship. The first stage of coaching involves establishing a solid relationship with the client. Establishing rapport and trust is essential if the relationship is to achieve its potential and for the client to achieve his or her goals. The client must be able to trust the coach's skills, while the coach needs to be honest about his or her capabilities. This "chemistry" builds the trust and credibility of the coach. The goal during this stage is to establish interdependence (not dependency), learning, and exploration. More importantly, it is the client who initiates the changes. The relationship emphasizes that it is the client who is responsible for the changes, challenge, and choice of direction. Also, at this stage it is important to clarify and set boundaries. Some questions that a coach tries to answer are: "Is there chemistry or a feeling of being able to work well with this person? Do we have clear guidelines and boundaries that the client is willing to meet? Did we establish timelines? Did we identify specific focus areas? Was confidentiality confirmed? Are the outcomes and expected results identified? Have I made the costs of my services clear?"

Stage 2: Assessing and Observing. The purpose of this stage is to get to know the client and organization better, to define success factors, and to clarify the roles of the stakeholder. Coaches can use the 360-degree approach, which assesses feedback about the client from both supervisors and subordinates to assess and gain insight into current client behaviors. They may also choose to interview members of the organization and the client. In-depth interviews are a form of assessment that can help the coach gain understanding of the client's behaviors, organization dynamics, and the situation. In this stage, the coach meets personally with subordinates, colleagues, and authorities of the client, as well as the client. Interviews and formal assessments are used to find gaps between client performance and the organization's expectations. This enables the coach to effectively identify problems the client is encountering through a range of information. The assessment results in finding the professional and personal strengths and weaknesses of the manager or executive.

Stage 3: The Coaching Conversations. Another unique aspect of the coaching relationship is the importance of structured and meaningful dialogue. In this stage, the coach demonstrates effective listening and questioning skills, and structured dialogue. Although confidentiality is an important characteristic in each stage, here confidentiality agreements

between the coach and client are essential. This stage moves past the symptoms and into the major underlying issues. The skills of flexibility, diagnosis and knowledge of contracting are important. One of the areas where dialogue is important is the initial feedback session. After the coach has gathered data from the assessments and interviews, in Stage 2, he or she will organize and present the information to the client. This involves clarifying strengths, identifying developmental needs, discussing objectives, interpreting results, and discussing the feelings the client may have about what others have reported. Consistent dialogue and feedback throughout the process ensures that the client will accept ownership of the feedback as well as commit to their responsibility for change. Completing this stage properly allows the client to move to the next stage, Stage 4, "Taking Action."

Stage 4: Taking Action. Taking action means the coach and client develop and implement a personal strategic plan. This action plan helps the client align with organizational functions, leadership development and building success. Essential characteristics of the action plan are strategies that include increasing job performance, enhancing communication, integrating professional work with personal life, and creating a balance. The areas that the coach and client collaborate are the client's strengths and weaknesses, areas to develop, steps to setting and meeting goals, and developing support both within and outside the organization. It is essential that the coach guides the client through decisions, offers feedback, and continues active listening. Finally, during this stage the coach and client decide what coaching methods work the best. Action plans usually include these steps:

1. Identify the need or area that will be worked on and formulate it into a goal.
2. Identify the specific steps needed to accomplish the goal.
3. Recruit any outside assistance needed to accomplish the goal. This support system is necessary.
4. Follow the plan and repeat as needed to achieve success.

Stage 5: Growth and Learning. At this stage the client assumes a more independent role. Decision-making, reflection, and questioning are all skills the client uses to continue his or her growth in personal and professional development. Continuous improvement means recognizing the need for change, new ideas, and implementing them effectively within the organization. The client demonstrates empowerment—an individual who looks for solutions instead of focusing on the problems. During this stage, a client works on developing self-awareness. Self-awareness is essential to behavioral change and personal growth. Self-awareness and self-regulation also can be invaluable assets to managers, executives, and employees. Individuals with self-awareness have established knowledge of themselves that promotes realistic goal setting, awareness of others, and ability to communicate their wants. Another important characteristic a client may demonstrate at this stage is self-regulation. This

describes an individual's ability to monitor their behaviors, elicit change from those behaviors, and increase their self-awareness. Another important component of this stage is for the client to build trusting relationships within the organization (Johnson, 2000). Learning how to build trust from the coach/client relationship, allows the client to build other trusting relationships. Stage 5 is where the client demonstrates essential skills needed for the client to meet his/her future goals and maintain his/her vision.

Stage 6: Monitoring and Maintaining. During this last stage, support is necessary so that the client continues positive behaviors, can deal with crises, and make effective decisions. The coach still may set up times to meet with the client, but those times are infrequent and are used as checkpoints. By the time a client arrives at Stage 6, he or she has become successful at developing goals, implementing actions plans, building relationships, and improving self-regulation. It is a challenge for an employee with new ideas and behaviors to continue those behaviors against the pressure of an old environment; coaches need to establish a stage for monitoring and maintaining client change. As throughout the entire coaching process, client responsibility for change and maintenance is essential. Support from others is one of the most powerful change levers for managers, executives or employees wanting to make personal and organizational change. Having others to help recognize patterns of behavior and changes is a great monitoring device.

Summary

In today's era of organizational transformation from hierarchical to flatter management structures, leaders are looking for strategies that encompass the individual as well as his/her learning and organizational success. Experts in the field contend that coaching is not a fad but a practical strategy that provides skills and abilities that are much needed. It provides a supportive context in which clients, leaders, and members of an organization can enhance their success and provide balance and meaning to their lives.

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General

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