

“Coach key to winning Team”



Did you know that the England World Cup rugby team (so it is said) had something like 14 experts coaching them? One of whom was specifically for the player who threw the ball into the lineout. Contrast this to a number of years ago when there was no dedicated Coach and the players were largely left to their own devices. Preparation, in comparison, was minimal and the team tactics basic. But then in those days rugby was a sport.

Now it is entertainment and that means big business. So today's game is totally different and if a team is to be successful every player needs to be coached. Nobody is excluded from this and if (s)he is not committed to this culture and practice then (s)he has no chance of becoming a successful player.

In today's business world we are hearing more and more about coaching. But what is it and has it changed to meet the fast changing needs of business? Here are some perspective on what both the executive and the organisation can expect from the coaching experience.

What's new about executive coaching? Coaching has the potential to change behaviour and build valuable skills. What's different about the modern approach is that it looks at what's happening in the organisation and then links individual performance to corporate objectives. The behaviour and skills aren't focussed on just "nice to know" but essential to the success of the organisation.

What are some typical results? Once executives go through this type of assessment process and become aware of their behaviour and the effect it has on co-workers, they often see a significant turnaround in a matter of a few months. Results are not only quick but also long-lasting. A recent study showed that changes in the skills and performance of executives being coached were still evident over two years later. For example an executive was appointed to a major integration task force after a big merger and was almost paralysed by anxiety. That was a matter of great concern to the company, which was relying on her to represent them. She started seeing her coach before every meeting doing role-plays, and working on her communication style and she ended up doing a great job. In another case, an executive was appointed as Chief Executive after his predecessor suddenly resigned and he was faced with the challenge of quickly winning the confidence of senior management. He hired a coach to get objective advice from someone with top management experience and hit the ground running much faster than he would have otherwise.

What are the benefits of using a Coach? Usually, but not always, executives who want to succeed are quite please to work with a coach. In some circles, it's even a status symbol. Why? Because first of all, such forward thinking executives see this as a unique opportunity for growth. Second, it gives them a confidential sounding board they wouldn't normally have. Why? Because the workplace is changing so rapidly these days, it can be hard to find a colleague whom you can confide in. Also you may confide in someone, only to find (s)he's been promoted to be your boss two

months later. Coaching gives executives a neutral place to test their assumptions, weigh risks, and mull over alternate strategies about all sorts of issues they may not be willing to discuss with anyone else.

Is the relationship between coach and executive highly confidential? Yes. Both coach and executive must be interested in reaching goals that benefit the company as a whole, but everything that transpires between them is private. For that reason it is essential that the coach maintains this balance. It will only be the excellent coach who has the experience, skills and integrity to achieve this. Too often coaches do not have this and the effectiveness of the coaching is lessened.

What are the obligations and responsibilities of each party? The process involves a series of shared responsibilities. For the coach, that means helping executives set appropriate plans, tracking and evaluating their progress, and measuring success in a way that's helpful to the company. The executive must be willing to be open and honest in the self-evaluation process, to do what's necessary to keep on track, and maintain a commitment to continue whatever new behaviours (s)he has learned.

But, of course, the management and company also must play their parts. Both have to provide an environment that's conducive to sustaining the desired change in behaviour. One company, for example, hired a coach to help an executive become more innovative but, when the coach asked whether they rewarded innovation even if it failed, the management replied that it didn't. The outcome of such an attitude is that if they aren't prepared to reward innovation regardless of the end result, they couldn't expect their executives to take risks. That's what is meant by a company creating a culture that supports the changes it wants.

What about team coaching and does that differ from individual coaching? In team coaching, a coach concentrates on developing leadership skills critical to the group working together successfully. That's different from the focus in individual coaching, where the coach is more concerned with the skill and behaviour needed to drive the business. And the teams in question tend to be involved in critical, time-sensitive situations, often the result of a merger or poor company performance. That's not always true with individuals. But even in team coaching, the coach works with individual members as well as the team as a whole.

Is this the same as coaching in other countries? Executive coaching is on the rise in many countries but there are definite culture differences. Much of it has to do with time. In Europe, coaching takes longer and is less action-oriented than here. The need for speed is just greater in the US and the culture is more geared to quick results. In Japan and possibly to a large extent in Northern Ireland, self-disclosure is considered a weakness. So coaching takes on a different model in every country and these difference must be respected.

But the importance of coaching in today's competitive and challenging environment remains the same.