

Improve job performance with executive coaching

Editor's note: This article summarizes a presentation by SHRM member Leslie B. Prager at the American Society for Training and Development Metro New York Chapter's Fall 1996 conference.

Executive coaching is an essential management development tool and technique, used to enable employees to operate at their full potential and to produce improved performance. Companies recognize the need to maximize their employees' potential in order to enhance both individual and company productivity.

Benefits of executive coaching include: improved performance and productivity; staff development; improved learning, working relationships, interdepartmental communication; and enhanced quality of life in the workplace. Typical coaching areas include people skills, managing relationships, organizational skills, career development, technical/problem-solving skills, interpersonal and communication skills, team building, presentation and leadership skills.

From both the company's and the individual's point of view, some potential advantages are:

- Increases possibilities for development, e.g., good performer with issues that get in the way
- Addresses specific business issues efficiently and effectively
- Provides confidentiality and fresh perspective. "It's lonely at the top" and sometimes an executive needs to speak with an objective and removed outsider
- Increases likelihood for opening discussion of issues and concerns
- Creates just-in-time, situation-specific and person-specific orientation
- Enhances productivity and performance

From the individual's point of view, a coach can help to deal with:

- A difficult boss (takes credit, blames you for his/her mistakes, unreasonable, drains you, moody)
- Difficult subordinates
- Difficult peers
- New role (newly promoted; now your former peers are your subordinates)
- Career management

- Dealing with internal politics
- Expectations in new position

From the employer or employee perspective, coaching needs do vary, but they tend to focus on dealing with people, running a business or department, altering your style. Specific contexts may be:

- Leadership (new hires, executive development, succession planning)
- Employee development (high-potential employees, long-term "problem" employees, performance issues)
- Career issues (corporate restructuring, decreased productivity, skill deficits)

For coaching to be effective, the "coachee" must be motivated. I call this the "coachability factor." Motivators include getting a raise, promotion, career future – all positive motivators; or career stalling, peer gets ahead of you or gets the promotion – all negative motivators.

The executive coaching process begins with a statement of the problem or situation. This includes both the corporate and individual goals and perceptions, and identification of critical issues and triggers.

Assessing the situation is the first step and can include: personal interview with the employee/executive; input from various sources ("coachee," supervisor, peers subordinates, human resources), and other sources of information (performance appraisals, physical tour of the company, "coachee" diary or log; standardized tools such as MBT1, 16PF and 360° feedback).

After the assessment, the coach will develop an action plan and present recommendations to human resources and to management specific goals, identification of strengths and developmental needs, specific behaviors to modify, enhance or reinforce, and the strategy to be undertaken to achieve the desired coaching result.

Evaluation and follow-up will occur to obtain additional relevant feedback throughout the coaching process, to see how performance and behavior have changed, and to ensure that both the organization's and the individual's goals have been reached. ■

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