

QUALITIES OF A GOOD LEADERSHIP COACH

by Glenn Williams



There are some excellent reasons why having an experienced leadership coach can be beneficial—

- They coach from areas of strength that may not be areas of strength for you
- They are an objective sounding board that brings significant experience
- They give you the opportunity to confide in a person with whom there is no conflict of interest

Empirical research into the outcomes resulting from leadership coaching as a development intervention has been limited. However, Feldman and Lankau provide some excellent insights and provide an agenda for future research we can benefit from (2005, pp. 829). Following are two key insights.

A coach's background and experience

Some prescribe to the belief that psychologists are the most qualified people to conduct executive coaching because of their understanding of psychological dynamics, adult development, personality and performance assessments as well as the importance of building and maintaining a trusted and confidential relationship.

Others believe the most effective executive coaches are those who are knowledgeable about the business context in which executives operate. They see “an understanding of leadership, business disciplines, management principles, and organizational politics as the critical core competency of executive coaches” (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001, pp. 205-228).

Desired outcomes from coaching

Usually, coaching is provided with a two-fold objective – first, to see positive changes in leadership and managerial behaviors; and second, to see an increase in performance and organizational effectiveness. There are three variables that impact the ability to measure these objectives effectively:

- The background and experience of the executive coach;
- The ability to link coaching to the organization's business outcomes; and
- Whether or not the individuals receiving the coaching understand that their development intervention is more about their future than the organization's future.

While organizations contract coaches to deliver a key service, if those being coached merely see this as an intervention that is performance-related rather than designed to develop and strengthen the individual leader, it is likely to result in limited outcomes. It is always desired that coaching come from an aspirational motivation, not a punitive measure inspired by correction—even if behavioral change is needed.

What's the bottom-line?

Though it is early days, the data shows leadership coaching can clearly result in improved leadership engagement, positive behavioral changes, and stronger performance. Below are some points to consider

- Ensure the leadership coach you appoint has the experience and skill needed to take you, or your team, and organization to the next level. Beyond this, you also need chemistry. Is the coach a good fit for your organization?
- While coaching may be desired to correct or change leadership behavior, how can I position this in a way that will motivate and inspire those who need coaching?
- How am I going to evaluate the efforts of the coach I appoint? Is there a clear accountability link, or a way to measure the business outcomes?

References

Feldman, Daniel C., and Melenie J. Lankau. (2005). "Executive Coaching: A Review and Agenda for Future Research", *Journal of Management*, 31.

Kampa-Kokesch, S., and M. Z. Anderson. (2001). Executive coaching: A comprehensive review of the literature. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 53.