

HALLMARKS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP COACHES

When it comes to identifying the right leadership coach for you and your organization, consumers face considerable challenges. As an unregulated service, individuals from varied backgrounds promote their expertise through coaching engagements. Just about every discipline is represented in the coaching community including teachers, nurses, business experts, sports coaches, attorneys, fitness specialists, counselors, and psychologists.



Unfortunately for the consumer, there is limited guidance as to the training or credentials coaches should have to be effective in this role. According to a survey conducted by Bono, Purvanova, Towler and Peterson (2009), some of the certification and training programs for coaches place more emphasis on marketing and sales than on the development of coaching skills (International Coaching Federation web site).

Whether coaching is intended to prepare high potential individuals for advancement or to remediate problem areas for existing leaders, Joyce Bono and colleagues (2009) remind us that the ultimate goal of a coaching intervention is sustained behavioral change. With this end in mind, specific coaching competencies should be investigated before hiring a coach.

Distinguishing Characteristics of Effective Coaches

Coaches that deliver high impact and long term behavioral change consistently demonstrate:

Assessment Skills – The best coaches investigate key issues using data gathering and measurement methods with established reliability and validity. These measures may include multi-rater methods and other assessment tools designed to diagnose problems and gain a more thorough understanding of potentially hidden issues. Personal interviews with superiors, peers, and direct reports of the coaching participants may also be implemented.

Analysis and Planning Skills – Effective coaches integrate measurement data and needs analysis information to identify problems, prioritize needs and establish sequential action plans.

Measurement of Coaching Success – Successful coaches objectively evaluate the impact of coaching interventions with an emphasis on achieved results. Outcome measurement is not an afterthought, but is planned as an integral part of the goal setting process. Objective measures of results serve to maintain

motivation toward behavioral change and establish benchmarks for celebrating success.

Knowledge of Business, Organizational Structure and Leadership – First-hand experience in a wide variety of organizational settings and at multiple leadership levels assists in establishing credibility and rapport with senior leaders. It also contributes to a practical orientation for action plans as opposed to an overly theoretical or clinical approach. A business, organizational and leadership foundation allows the coach to appreciate the political realities and associated barriers in which behavioral change must occur.

Knowledge and Understanding of Human Behavior – The best coaches evidence a firm foundation in the behavioral sciences including applied psychological training in human learning, motivation and behavior change. This background is essential in moving recipients of coaching beyond their comfort zones in order to stretch individual ability levels and promote growth. Skilled coaches foster growth and exploration of challenging issues within a safe environment that protects the self-worth of individuals.

Promotion of Self-Awareness – Effective coaches are skilled in enhancing a participant's ability to gain insight into his/her own behavior and to appreciate how leader behaviors impact others. Highlighting new perspectives on difficult situations requires the ability to offer challenging feedback in a manner that promotes receptivity rather than defensiveness.

Sustained Self-Development – Superior coaches work themselves out of a job by modeling and promoting strategies that participants can employ for continued growth beyond the coaching relationship. A finite number of coaching sessions is established at the outset and supported by outcome measures. Following work with a skilled coach, leaders should demonstrate the ability to move themselves from self-insight and expanded self-awareness into actions for sustained learning.

Armed with a more thorough appreciation for the characteristics of effective coaches, organizations and individuals alike can proceed with more confidence in selecting coaches who deliver sustained behavioral change in leaders at all levels.

Additional Reading

Bono JR, Purvanova RK, Towler AJ, Peterson DB. (2009). A survey of executive coaching practices. *Personnel Psychology*, 62, 361-404.

Ting S, Scisco P. (Eds.). (2006). *The CCL handbook of coaching: A guide for the leader coach*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.