

## PERFORMANCE COACHING

Executive or business coaching is rapidly becoming one of the fastest growing industries in the United States and demand is also increasing significantly across the UK. But what exactly *is* executive coaching and what benefits does it really offer? Is it just the latest in a long line of business fashion accessories?

There is ever increasing pressure on executives to perform to even greater levels of competence and to adapt effectively to rapidly changing environments. This pressure, in turn, increases the speed at which people need to develop both existing and new skills.

Leaps in performance are seldom achieved through formal management or professional education; although these are usually a pre-requisite. What is required, however, is learning from the personal experience of others, increased self-awareness and self-confidence, seeing things from different perspectives and the ability to develop and use latent or under-used abilities. Much of this can be most effectively achieved through objective intervention from an executive coach who can help you think about your performance and career needs and how these can be best developed.

### **What is Coaching?**

We're familiar with sports coaching - the number of sports stars populating the after dinner circuit suggests there is much to learn from their approach. But what about executive coaching? In essence, coaching helps to facilitate change – change which helps the individual to move to the next level of performance. The process of coaching is the skilful intervention of a third party, who helps the individual utilise and build on their own internal resources, finding their own answers and solutions and stretching their own frame of reference about their abilities and potential. A good coach doesn't need to be an expert in the 'coachee's' job. Effective listening, skilful questioning and constructive challenging can provide valuable insights - increasing awareness and self-confidence, which in turn enables individuals to develop skills, take on new challenges or overcome problems.

Coaching also helps to develop clear goals and to determine what is important to you and what you want to achieve.

### **Coach Yourself with a Career Health Check**

Are you taking action to make the most of your talents and career opportunities? Is your career on track and are you confident that you are moving in the direction you want to go?

Answering some of these questions might help you to determine the extent to which you are in control of your career. If you recognise any of these symptoms as relevant to yourself, then some action may be needed:

For example:

- Is it difficult keeping up with the pace of change?
- To what degree do you have control of your career and who makes the important decisions – you or others (i.e. manager, your partner etc)?
- Have missed promotions that you really deserved?
- Are you paid what you believe you are worth?

- Do others overlook your potential?
- Do you see new challenges as a cause for concern or as an opportunity?
- Do you know what you want to be doing in 5 years time?
- Are you in the right job, profession or organisation?

### **Taking Action for Yourself**

Building confidence and self-awareness can be difficult on your own; talk to people whose views and opinions you trust – and accept their feedback as objectively as you can. What insight does that give you on your key strengths or your weaknesses? To what extent do the views of others confirm or differ from your own and why might there be differences? Perceptions can be very powerful but they're not necessarily the truth, so think about how you might be able to change or influence others to provide them with a more positive view of your ability, or potential. Sometimes the most difficult beliefs to change are the limiting ones we have about ourselves. This is where coaching can be such a powerful tool.

There are very few sectors left where stability and certainty is guaranteed. Keeping skills and knowledge up to date, to cope with the pace of change, is essential - especially if you have an eye to the next promotion, or an opportunity that will help develop career prospects. It can be difficult to find the time when there are so many other pressures and demands, but developing a 'transferable' skill set and knowledge base are increasingly important as career structures become more fluid.

Understanding your strengths and weaknesses and how you can best play to your strengths, whilst mitigating your weaknesses are important skills. This comes back to having good self-awareness. As you progress in the organisational hierarchy, it is also necessary to be aware of internal politics and how these may impact on you and your job. This isn't a case of becoming Machiavellian – it's a case of being sufficiently 'streetwise' to know who holds most influence and who your powerful allies are, as well as how internal politics can make or break a project, a job, or even a career. If you don't know who the 'movers and shakers' are in your organisation – find out!

Whilst considering politics, it is also important to ensure that you raise your profile with those who may be able to help you achieve the career goals that you want. Unfortunately, the premise of "if I do a good job my worth will be recognised" does not always hold true – and there are plenty of others around who might be happy to claim your achievements as theirs, particularly if you keep quiet about them. Make sure that your manager knows what your successes are.

Networking internally and externally is also valuable for raising profile and, although time consuming, this activity can produce dividends with regards to increasing senior management's awareness of you – and even in attracting job offers from other companies. Another valuable way of raising your profile is to volunteer for project work or different assignments. Although this can mean additional work, it will increase your skills and experience, as well as identifying you as someone prepared to 'go the extra mile'.

One of the most important areas with regards to fulfilling your own potential, however, is the setting of clear goals. To paraphrase Lewis Carol – if you don't know where you're going, then a map is going to be of little use. People often fail to determine the goals that then make a route map – or a career plan – that can direct your way forward.

These are just a few ideas to help you think about your career and take some action to help progress it further. One-to-one coaching can provide another very powerful means of working on these areas. Through developing skills, changing beliefs and increasing confidence and self awareness, changes in behaviour can be achieved that help boost performance and potential.

So, on finishing this article commit to three positive actions to help you move in the direction you want.....then make sure you take them!

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