

CAVEAT EMPTOR: THE CONSEQUENCES OF LOWERING COACHING COSTS

As executive coaching becomes more pervasive, more and more organizations and their employees are recognizing the benefit and requesting it. Given the high cost and the fact that few companies have unlimited budgets, it's understandable that organizations are looking for ways to make this valuable tool more available while keeping costs within reason.

Our clients have shared with us a variety of approaches they have used in an attempt to achieve this balance. Among the most common are using practitioners who do phone coaching, using in-house coaches, contracting with independent coaches, paying less for coaching for junior executives, and controlling program parameters or shortening program length.

I have two words of advice for companies that are looking to get creative in lowering costs: caveat emptor. There could be a serious downside to each of these approaches.

Companies pay a great deal for executive coaching, and few can afford to waste those resources. At the end of the day, you get what you pay for. It's important to us to know that our clients are getting the maximum value for those precious coaching dollars. That's why we'll step back from something we don't think provides the best value. Personally, I'd rather see fewer people getting better coaching than large numbers of people getting inferior coaching. Here's why:

PHONE COACHING—Until video conferencing becomes the norm, I am not ready to go down the phone-coaching path. Why? Because there is no substitute for face-to-face contact. Coaches need to see non-verbal cues and reactions to accurately gauge the impact



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

HR IN THE SPOTLIGHT

What's behind recent articles like "Why We Hate HR" in the August issue of *Fast Company*

and the "Star Search" cover article on talent management in the October 10 issue of *BusinessWeek*? Why the sudden business-press spotlight on HR, both negative and positive?

I can think of a number of reasons. Key among them are the following:

- Increasing competition in the job market
- The coming talent shortage and brain drain as baby boomers retire
- The innovation imperative
- Stepped up M&A and restructuring activity
- Increased scrutiny on publicly-held companies in the post Sarbanes-Oxley environment

Each of these challenging situations puts HR front and center.

STRATEGIC ASSET; STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

The most strategic asset any company has today—whether you think of this as the Age of Information, the Digital Age, or the Age of Innovation—is talent. And HR is the caretaker of this most critical, and costly, investment.

So it's a time of both challenge and opportunity for our HR colleagues. However negative Keith Hammonds may have been in his *Fast Company* article

NEED FOR SPEED IN HIRING IT CONSULTANTS

The job market has come back and so have the challenges of a competitive environment. “We became accustomed to a new state of ‘business as usual’ during the slow-down of the last few years,” says Donna Held, head of the Ayers IT Consulting group. “We had gotten used to a market where consultants were happy just to have opportunities and would take whatever rate was offered. Employers had the luxury of time and choice. Now it looks as if we’re moving back toward the old boom paradigm, and it requires some adjustment.



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“The market is more robust and rates are rising,” she continues. “Good consultants are being snapped up, which means clients have to be prepared to act quickly. For example, one of our consultants had an initial telephone interview on a Friday and was scheduled for a technical interview the following Monday. It never happened. The client made him an offer on the phone and instead of doing the second interview Monday, he started work. This scenario has become more prevalent.

“Clients tell me they understand what the market is

like. But by the time they call us to say they like a particular candidate, the possibility is becoming greater that the candidate is off the market. IT is such a specialized field, the pool of great—or even good—candidates in each area isn’t very deep. You can’t wait a week; you can’t even wait two days. If you find a candidate you want, you have to act right away.”



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“It’s important for clients who hire technical consultants from us to understand how hot the market for the best candidates is,” says Bob Deissig, President of Staffing Services. “This is the best year we’ve had in our Technical Consulting practice since Y2K. All indications point to the year concluding on the same high note. In fact, on both sides of our staffing business, October has been one of the busiest and best months we’ve ever had.”

“But there is a difference on the full-time side. It’s still not like it was in the dot-com years, when any reasonable candidate got hired. The market may be hot, but employers continue to be very careful, selective, and methodical. The process is still the process.” ■

STAFFING ANNOUNCEMENT

We are pleased to welcome **Bradley Ervin** to the Staffing Services Group as a Junior Recruiter. Brad comes to Ayers with experience in staffing, training and evaluating employee performance, as well as in customer service. His background includes working in the financial services, IT and telecommunications industries, as well as entrepreneurial experience in wireless products and services. ■

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To have the *Ayers Report* sent to others in your organization, please contact Roberta Martin at roberta.martin@ayers.com or 212.889.7788.

10 PRINCIPLES FOR EXECUTIVE WOMEN

When Dr. Rosemary Lynch began her executive-coaching career in the late 1980s, she quickly found herself drawn to coaching women. When asked what attracted her, she responded, “Their highly developed intuition and sense of awareness. These were real assets because they allowed us to begin the coaching assignment from a higher-level launching pad.”

As Rosemary, who is Director of Organizational Effectiveness Coaching at Ayers, shifted her focus to coaching female executives, she began to recognize common threads woven through the stories they told. “It became clear to me that these women were relying on similar behaviors in the workplace. And these behaviors were letting them down, drawing criticism from people around them and leaving them feeling inadequate.”

Responding to the issues and dilemmas she saw women facing in the workplace, she developed a set of *10 principles to help her clients and their peers.

Distinguish between reacting and responding—Recognize that reacting and responding are two separate actions. Once you’ve identified the nature of your reaction, make a decision about how to respond—or whether to respond at all.

Create consistency between your head and your heart—The work you do and the options you choose should not only be right from the perspectives of business and ethics, they should also represent what you truly want to be doing. This requires a degree of reflection about which aspects of past work you’ve most enjoyed.

Shift to being proactive rather than reactive—If you define what you’re looking for, you create criteria that provide an excellent basis for evaluation as opportunities present themselves. Pursuing a career becomes a proactive and conscious activity.

Be proud of who you are and what you’ve done—Many senior executive women are not practiced in formulating a positive self-assessment. Many were raised in an era when a woman who regarded her capabilities or appearance in a positive way earned a reputation as being conceited or boastful. Learn to give yourself credit for being the person you are and for your accomplishments.

Identify and understand sources of anger—If you are frequently angry, it’s important to figure out

why. You might be angry with yourself or a particular situation in your life and projecting that onto others. Consistent demonstration of anger in the workplace prevents healthy interactions and limits opportunities for advancement.



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Learn to let go—Once a situation has passed, review what you’ve learned and release the episode. As much as you may want to bring the event back so you can do or say something differently, you can’t! Obsessing is not only unhealthy, it deprives you of valuable energy you could be using to influence and improve something happening in the present.

Maintain an objective outlook—How do you see the world? Do you engage in blaming? Do you find yourself labeling people and events good or bad, right or wrong? It’s so liberating to know you can learn to be an observer rather than a round-the-clock critic.

Play tennis on your own side of the net—Imagine your job, and your life, as a tennis game. Don’t hit the ball and then run around to the other court to make sure it gets hit back properly. That’s the other player’s job. You have to stay on your own side of the net to develop more balanced interactions.

Self evaluate—It is very important to evaluate your own performance and behavior while learning to heed your intuition. When there is a dichotomy between how you believe you’re performing and the feedback you receive from someone in the workplace, don’t automatically give credence to the other perspective without assessing it for accuracy.

Feel free to “act as if”—This final principle applies to the others by helping you understand how to approach each new behavior you would like to master. It isn’t necessary to “feel changed” before acting. In fact, new behaviors need to be practiced over time until they become part of who you are. That’s when change will occur. *©2005 Rosemary Maxwell Lynch, Psy.D. All Rights Reserved. ■

Rosemary will explore these principles in more depth in upcoming issues of the *Ayers Report*, calling on examples encountered in coaching women at FORTUNE 500 companies in a variety of industries, including advertising/public relations, consumer products, financial services, health care and retail.



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Partnership *noun*: The state of being a partner [one associated with another, especially in an action: associate, colleague].

PARTNERING WITH HR

Over the years at The Ayers Group, we have forged relationships with the HR leadership in many different organizations. These relationships have grown into partnerships, enabling us to work side by side with our HR colleagues in a variety of settings and circumstances. Whether it is to resolve issues, answer questions, or provide professional support and advice, our objective is to add value in any way we can, according to the client's particular needs. Following are some thumbnail case studies of the forms these partnerships have taken.

- Two senior HR executives were charged with coordinating a major restructuring that involved the primary product areas of an international bank. The institutional culture maintained a high regard for employees, and management was very sensitive about the significant number of terminations that would result from the reorganization. We became involved with the HR team in the early planning stages and helped develop a termination schedule that provided ample time for our career-transition consultants to meet individually with newly terminated employees on site. This gave employees an opportunity to express their feelings, as well as to receive advice on how best to communicate the news to their families and get information about the comprehensive array of resources and services they would receive as they began their transition journey. Most left with a sense of encouragement, and management was extremely pleased with the

professional treatment all affected employees received.

- A FORTUNE 1000 company that had previously experienced litigation as a result of reduction-in-force actions turned to us to help prevent a recurrence as it prepared for a cutback that would affect several hundred employees. We worked with HR to develop a complex multi-city, multi-day schedule supporting the reduction. In addition, we provided termination training for line management in the various locations. As a result of this planning and excellent execution on the part of the HR and line teams, there wasn't a single case of litigation.

- We developed a creative solution for a client that was going to close a 300-person facility over a period of several months. The company needed a core of employees to stay in place at the facility, which had a history of serious labor disputes, and maintain productivity while work was shifted to other plants. Our solution provided for carefully managed support of the remaining employees during the work day, including seminars and individual consulting, and a career fair scheduled just before the release dates. Not only did productivity increase, but employees who had been part of a class-action suit against the company withdrew, resulting in the suit's dismissal.

Our partnerships extend beyond providing support during downsizing initiatives.

- We partnered with an HR Director who was charged with developing a joint Office of the Chairman. The position was to be shared among

three executives, each with different business agendas and operating out of different cities. In addition to helping structure the executives' roles and establishing common goals and operating processes, we provided ongoing guidance as the three business leaders transitioned into their new roles.

- A candidate who was being considered for a senior role elicited very different personal reactions from the line-management team. The HR manager called us in during the interview process because we had an excellent understanding of the business, the function involved, and the unique corporate culture. We brought an outsider's dispassionate perspective to the process. We reviewed the feedback from the management team, then interviewed the candidate with the objective of reconciling the disparate perspectives. Our assessment was part of the decision to hire. The executive is in his fifth year at the firm and has been recognized as a valuable leader.

- We provided just-in-time current market data on severance policies within several different industries for clients who were reviewing their policies, in some cases as part of a cyclical review and in others as they were preparing for a potential reduction in force.

We take both the word and the spirit of partnership very seriously as we work with our Human Resource colleagues. We welcome the opportunity to work with you in support of the different aspects of your role as an HR and business leader and to developing or extending our partnership in that effort. ■

WINNING NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

You do all your networking. You interview. Now you've got a job offer, but the job-search process isn't quite over yet. There's still the issue of how you negotiate the best compensation package.

To better meet the needs of candidates in a more active marketplace, The Ayers Group is expanding its focus on preparing them to enter the all-important nego-

tiation process with confidence. Our interactive negotiation seminar provides insights into the psychology of negotiating, as well as strategies and techniques that will result in win-win situations as candidates work out salary and/or benefit packages with prospective employers. The curriculum includes case studies that highlight key obstacles and strategies for overcoming them. Small-group role-playing exercises, coupled with facilitator

feedback, encourage participants to practice appropriate negotiating techniques—including collaborative problem solving—in a supportive environment.

The seminar, held twice a month in The Ayers Group's New York office, is open to all levels of candidates. For more information, contact Dr. Peter Olsinski, Director of New York Consulting Services, at peter.olsinski@ayers.com.

SUCCESSFUL LANDINGS—Partnering With Candidates

Every candidate brings a different set of needs and challenges to the job-search process. The ability to accommodate those needs and address those challenges increases the likelihood of success, particularly in this increasingly competitive marketplace.

The degree of flexibility The Ayers Group builds into its outplacement programs is an important differentiator. "We do our best to adapt and even customize our approach to each candidate," says Terry Ebert, head of the firm's Career Transitions group. "Our programs go beyond a standard menu of options to partner with our candidates."

Following are three case studies that highlight this tailored approach.

Case Study 1: A CEO who found himself without a job after his company was acquired came to his career transition program with a solid job opportunity in hand. The Ayers Group mobilized a team of specialized consultants to help the executive leverage that opportunity and also to provide critical new thinking about ways to improve his prospects for long-term success. In-house Certified Financial Planner Doug O'Connor worked with the executive to explore stock-option strategies and elucidate change-of-control clauses. A tax attorney provided additional interpretation of state and federal laws, as well as advice regarding offshore accounts and terms of contracts. A third consultant was called in to provide ongoing coaching support as the executive transitioned into his new position as COO of a non-

hierarchical financial services organization with worldwide operations—a culture very different from the one in which he had spent the past 20 years. Although he has only just begun this new chapter in his career, the executive knows he has a team of experts behind him and can more confidently focus on leading his new organization.

Case Study 2: Downsizing and the subsequent job search are difficult under the best of conditions. Occasionally, candidates have to contend with this stressful process while coping with other life crises. One mid-level manager lost his wife to a protracted illness while in the early stages of outplacement. He took advantage of the Ayer's policy that allows candidates to freeze their outplacement programs to adjust to personal circumstances, but economic reality forced him to re-enter the market earlier than was optimal. Ayers restructured the outplacement time frame to adapt to the candidate's state of mind and ability to function. His consultant focused their one-on-one sessions on helping the candidate come to terms with his loss and the changes in his life. This included making the candidate aware of his former company's EAP program and various bereavement groups within the community and providing support in exploring these resources. The candidate was given flexibility in the use of office space so he could network more frequently with fellow candidates and have a place other than home where he felt a sense of belonging. These accommodations made the candidate's initial bereavement

experience more bearable and allowed him to balance his personal life and job search agenda more effectively to help ensure a successful landing.

Case Study 3: A very self-actuated senior marketing director from the publishing industry began sending out resumés before entering her transition program at Ayers. Although she quickly secured interviews, many turned out to be for positions that were too junior. Her Ayers' consultant helped the candidate reposition her resumé to highlight her personal brand and impressive portfolio of successful product launches. Mobilizing her extensive network, the candidate quickly found herself with a full calendar of coffees, lunches, and industry conferences. Urged to keep an open mind and target positions and organizations she found to be exciting and innovative, the executive secured multiple interviews with a diverse group of companies within her industry. When a part-time consulting position was offered, the candidate's consultant encouraged her to use the opportunity to keep her skills sharp and improve her value in the marketplace. Four months and more than a dozen interviews later, the candidate found herself in the enviable—but difficult—position of having offers from three companies with exciting but very different product directions. Her consultant helped her weigh the pros and cons of each offer and navigate the negotiations. These discussions helped the executive make her final decision: to accept a senior editorial position with a leading publishing organization. ■

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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he was dead on about one thing: “HR is the corporate function with the greatest potential—the key driver, in theory, of business performance...” The questions being raised in his and other articles pertain to what HR is doing with its proverbial seat at the table, what it's doing to seize the strategic imperative, and how it's demonstrating real value.

Although every client company we work with has pockets of excellence in dealing with critical HR issues, the challenge they run into is consistently achieving excellence across the board. Over the course of the past year, my colleagues and I have talked in these pages about the issues most likely to be on your front burner: retention, talent management, succession planning and diversity. Are you reevaluating these in light of the changing business environment and, particularly, the coming demographic shift?

It's not a time for HR to be a follower; it's a time to be a leader. To be a true partner to senior management, you have to be a businessperson who also happens to be an HR professional. Nanette Byrnes observed in the *BusinessWeek* cover story that HR “can be a fast route to the top at companies that care about talent.” We've seen it happen for HR professionals who have made it their business to do the following:

- **Understand the organization and its business environment.** What drives the business? Who are the core customers? Who is the competition? What are the challenges? Opportunities? How does the company achieve growth? Create value for shareholders? What are the goals and objectives?
- **Be strategic.** Understand the role of human assets in achieving the organization's goals and objectives so you can align HR objectives with corporate objectives.

- **Be future focused.** Your organization's long-term health depends on understanding how the business environment is changing and preparing for that change. You need to keep one eye focused on the present and the other on the road ahead.

- **Be open, flexible and adaptable.** It's not a time for people who are complacent or wedded to one way of doing things. In a world of change, organizations need to be agile. As corporate strategy changes, HR strategy needs to change with it or even be ahead of it.

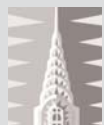
- **Take ownership.** Like all other parts of the business, you have to deliver real results that have an impact on growth, profitability and value creation.

- **Take responsibility for developing the HR leaders of tomorrow.** What development initiatives do you have in place for creating depth of bench in your own discipline? Who is responsible for growing tomorrow's HR leaders if not you?

One of the reasons The Ayers Group exists is to help you stay on top of the issues and prepare for the future. It's why we bring you together at events such as our leadership breakfast with Johnson & Johnson Chairman Bill Weldon and our “Re-Tension in the Global Economy” panel discussion. These gatherings also provide an opportunity to exchange ideas with your peers and gain insight into best practices.

I firmly believe the real value of HR will become increasingly apparent as you undertake the critical succession-planning initiative the retirement wave has necessitated. And we're here to partner with you in any way we can. You can always reach me at bill.ayers@ayers.com. ■

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY



While the Ayers Group marked its 30th anniversary in August, the firm's home—the Chrysler Building—recently celebrated its 75th. It is one of the last skyscrapers in the Art Deco style and was the tallest building in the world until the completion of the Empire State Building. This summer, Manhattan's Skyscraper Museum asked 100 architects, developers, engineers, realtors, urban planners, historians and others to name their 10 favorite towers in the Big Apple. The Chrysler Building topped the list with 90 votes. ■

CURING OE PROBLEMS IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Managers in the pharmaceutical industry succeed not only because of their technical expertise, but also because they can create synergies and a sense of purpose among groups of diverse professionals. Pharmaceutical companies are generally highly matrixed, team-based organizations. The key in speeding drugs to market is to have functions such as R&D, regulatory affairs, manufacturing, and marketing work together closely. Clinical trials are performed by multidisciplinary teams that are often virtual and multicultural.

Uniting team members around common goals and objectives and keeping the process on track and on budget can be a challenge. Teams often comprise people who are accustomed to working independently and have different priorities and technical expertise. As in IT, the professionals tend to have strong skills in their disciplines and a focus on technical achievement. Less attention is given to interpersonal skills and how those contribute to achievement of results.

Not surprisingly, much of the work we do in the industry relates to team effectiveness and leadership development. Following are several examples.

Case Study 1: The data management department of a clinical research organization suffered from poor morale and high turnover. The survey we designed to assess the issues revealed inconsistency in the managers' approaches to project management. This was critical since staff rotated among project teams.

Based on our findings, we worked with the management team to develop a leadership competency model. We then developed an online 360° instrument that helped us evaluate each manager against the model and a team-effectiveness assessment in which the managers identified individual development and team needs.

The next step was to help managers create individual development plans. In addition to one-on-one coaching, they received group leadership training through a customized four-part program that addressed their shared challenges and business issues.

The results: Managers not only improved individual leadership skills, they also built effective mechanisms for working together, sharing best practices, and collaboratively managing individuals across teams. Turnover declined significantly within a short period of time.

Case Study 2: The R&D unit of a major pharmaceutical company was missing some milestones in clinical trials. There was a pattern of conflict within the virtual project teams and lack of recognition of who was in charge. Because clinical-trial teams are peer groups, managers need to achieve results through influence rather than authority.

Our objective was to enable the clinical trial managers to improve their positive influence skills, helping them build and manage stronger teams. The first step was a customized survey to elicit the managers' strengths and weaknesses. This allowed us to create a program that focused on key issues while using the managers' vocabulary and day-to-day situations.

The program was designed to help them recognize strengths and weaknesses in their teams; appreciate and respect the differences in others; and understand that diversity provides strength. An effective team draws on the different styles of its members in communicating and problem solving. Open discussion and constructive disagreement can lead to insight and creativity. Having a limited behavioral style within the team stifles this, resulting in an approach that is narrower and less effective.

We provided background on different behavioral styles; how they present in interactions; how they need, share, and use information in different ways; and how to influence each. Role-playing allowed the managers to practice "selling" ideas to people with different behavioral styles. A unique feedback strategy enabled each of the department subteams to provide advice anonymously to the others.

The results: Individual clinical trial managers became more flexible and skillful in influencing team members. As a group, they developed stronger relationship-building skills. Knowledge sharing increased and fewer milestones were missed.

Case Study 3: Not all of our OE work in pharmaceuticals is team-focused. A global health care organization lacked bench-strength for a pivotal role in R&D. This was a critical issue since the company was making multiple acquisitions, and there was major growth in the business. We designed and delivered a structured interview process to assess current succession practices and scientists' perceptions of opportunities for promotion.

The results: We worked with HR and R&D leadership to restructure certain roles and increase the number and quality of senior scientists who were ready for key leadership positions. ■

Pharmaceuticals is one of many industries to which Ayers brings depth of experience in OEC. For more information, contact Managing Director Joan Caruso at joan.caruso@ayers.com or 212.889.7788.

Joseph Bruccoleri, Director of OEC for The Ayers Group's N.J. offices, has acted as consultant, team facilitator, executive coach and trainer to FORTUNE 500 companies in pharmaceuticals and health care, among other industries.



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they are having on their coachees. Also, coachees need to maintain focus. During phone coaching, you can't see whether an executive is multitasking. These are busy, successful people who have learned to make every minute count, so it's a good bet they are. Phone and email are good ways to stay in touch between face-to-face sessions, but they are not effective substitutes.

PAYING LESS FOR COACHING FOR JUNIOR PEOPLE—

Clients frequently tell us they don't mind using expensive coaches for senior people, but they don't want to pay as much when it comes to their juniors. I am tempted to ask, "Does that mean you want less-qualified coaches or an inferior skill set?" We do have a different range for coaching mid-level executives, but it has a hard floor because we are not willing to compromise on the skill level of our coaches.

IN-HOUSE COACHING—On a related subject, clients often tell us, "We only use internal coaches for junior people." There is a long-standing debate about the pros and cons of internal coaching. First-hand knowledge of the organization and how it works can make an internal coach highly effective and empathetic. But this closeness also can hamper objectivity. Internal coaches who are involved in succession planning, talent reviews, or talent management may have an inherent conflict. They are learning things about executives whose futures may be affected by decisions the coaches make while wearing an HR hat. Given this duality, is it possible to be truly objective and avoid integrating such information? Will coachees view an internal coach as objective in the long run? How do you build trust, which has to be the foundation of effective coaching?

There are successful models for using internal coaching resources effectively, among them IBM and Johnson & Johnson. The key is segregating the internal role to coaching and OD consulting on a full-time basis, with no participation in HR or talent-management decisions.

USING INDEPENDENT COACHES—There are plenty of lower-cost independent coaching providers. As coaching has become more accepted, barriers to entry into the

profession have been lowered and certifying organizations have proliferated. Skills, qualifications, background and experience vary widely.

The advantage of working with a firm like Ayers instead of going directly to independents is that we stake our reputation on the quality of our coaches. We manage each engagement, finding the best fit between coach and coachee, between expert and coaching need. In managing our coaches, we emphasize collaboration, sharing of best practices, and translating the learning from a coaching engagement into enhancing the organization's effectiveness.

CONTROLLING PROGRAM PARAMETERS/SHORTENING PROGRAMS—

In an effort to control costs, some companies—especially those that do a great deal of coaching—may dictate the framework: "We want X number of sessions, each X hours long, over X period of time." They're looking for an across-the-board formula. As I discussed in a recent column, there is a related trend toward wanting shorter and shorter coaching programs.

We coach by objectives. That means we make sure everyone—the coachee, manager, HR and coach—are clear on what the objectives are. Research has shown that it takes about 90 days to change behavior and another 90 to reinforce the change, which is why six months is the norm for our executive coaching programs. We specify the number of hours we put into each program, but then we give our coaches tremendous latitude in determining how to work with coachees to achieve the objectives. Dictating the framework negates the coach's effectiveness because one size does not fit all. Individuals have different issues, needs, and learning styles, and the engagement has to be tailored to those.

No one likes to say "no" to opportunity. But we do sometimes have to decline engagements because we believe strongly in not compromising on the quality of our coaches or the delivery outcomes. Talent is your top asset. Talent management is not an area where you want to compromise. ■

For more information about coaching and other OEC needs, contact Joan Caruso, Managing Director, Organizational Effectiveness Consulting, at joan.caruso@ayers.com or 212.889.7788.