

MAXIMIZING THE ROI OF EXECUTIVE COACHING

As executive coaching becomes more complex and pervasive, organizations face the challenge of applying and managing this resource effectively to maximize ROI. Coaching that occurs in a vacuum—without being aligned to the company and its culture, strategic direction, and talent-management objectives, as well as to the specific situation and developmental objectives—does not enhance organizational effectiveness. Without standards that create the alignment, coaching can be a series of disparate initiatives.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW

In some organizations, coaches are brought in by senior line management for a particular assignment and then migrate around the organization on their own. HR people at these companies have told us, "We have no idea where these people are, how long they've been there, or what they're doing." It's like having independent workmen all over your house without a general contractor and a blueprint.

The good news is that an increasing number of companies view executive coaching strategically and are centralizing it under HR. If you are charged with managing a coaching program, you need to be knowledgeable about the state of the art so you can make better decisions in setting standards, selecting and monitoring coaches, and troubleshooting problems.

There is much more involved in effective coaching than matching the chemistry of coach and candidate. We frequently encounter HR professionals who are not asking coaches the right questions, who are allowing candidates to interview and select their own coaches—and, in some cases, who are having trouble even convincing management of the need for a coaching program. These situations often stem from a lack of knowledge about coaching.

For HR professionals responsible for executive coaching programs and efforts in their organizations, it can be helpful to turn to someone with experience for assistance in filling in the knowledge gaps.

MASTERING THE BASICS

The first step is understanding the basics:

- The differences among coaching, therapy, personal counseling, and EAPs
- The various coaching approaches, models, and assessment tools, and which work best in which situations
- The characteristics of an effective coach and how to ensure a good coach/candidate fit
- The nature of the coaching process: structure, needs assessment, confidentiality, the roles of the various stakeholders (HR, sponsor/manager, and candidate), measuring and reporting results

- When to coach and when not to
- The obstacles within the organization and the candidate that can derail the process and how to head them off
- How to set and manage expectations

We can provide this foundation and make sure you consider all the factors and options that go into developing standards that are right for your organization and then using those standards to select and manage relationships with external coaches. Once the program is in place, we can help you address and resolve issues and conflicts, answer questions, and assist in program evaluation on an ongoing basis.

TAPPING OUTSIDE EXPERTISE

organizational development initiatives is that if there are systemic problems, external coaches can serve as detectors. We advocate and can facilitate group debriefings to extract and pool the coaches' insights about what the company is doing right and wrong from a managerial viewpoint, without breaching confidentiality. This is valuable information too many companies leave lying on the table. Systemic problems that remain unaddressed can have enormous implications for organizational effectiveness.

Yet another area in which outside advisers can be invaluable is in setting up internal coaching programs. The use of internal coaching makes it possible to bring cost-effective coaching to lower levels of the organization. We can help HR define, structure, promote, and deliver such a program. We can also train HR professionals to deliver the coaching—coach the coaches—objectively review and/or supervise cases, and provide confidential peer-level consultations as needed.

As companies come to better understand the importance of coaching to talent management and organizational effectiveness and invest more in coaching programs, HR needs to make sure this resource is leveraged wisely to get the best ROI. ■



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