Executive Coaching

Introduction

Many businesses today teeter on the edge of great success and mediocrity due to issues with management. Then there is the latter; those businesses that fail due to management problems. If you have ever seen an episode of Spike's *Bar Rescue* or Food Network's *Restaurant Impossible,* you may have noticed an underlying theme. It's not that each TV show has a coach who is not afraid to yell, scream, point fingers, or even throw things in some cases. In almost every episode there is an owner who is not living up to their title and who is resistant to change. They are unwilling to change until, by some miracle, the host of the show has an intervening moment with the owner. This ultimately concludes in yelling, tears, and eventually the owner promising to change their behaviors.

This example is relatable to the job of an executive coach (minus the drama). In executive coaching, the TV show host would be the coach and the owner of the bar or restaurant would be the executive. Executive Coaching has been around for years[i] and many businesses have reported success gained through coaching[ii, iii]. Executive coaches are individuals who are extremely competent in organizational behavior and psychological theories. They not only help improve leadership effectiveness in executives, but do it through many approaches. Ultimately a coach will assess problems by gathering a lot of data, give the executive feedback about how to improve deficiencies, coach them through these improvement sessions, and then evaluate their progress. Much more is involved in these steps, but the goal is to help the executives develop leadership styles, adjust to change, and ultimately improve

organizational performance via coaching executives. The following describes commitments coaches live up to and an overview of the typical executive coaching process.

Coaching Commitments

Coaches have many commitments to the coach-executive relationship [iv]. A good coach remains objective by equally viewing the perspectives of the executive and the rest of the organization. They inspire the coach to look at both long-term and short-term effects from their behaviors and how it can affect others. They encourage the highest leverage actions by communicating whether potential changes are low or high in leverage. Coaches do their best to make sure the executive maximizes their contributions to the needs of the organization. They must utilize the right assessment tools, gather appropriate data, and interpret their results accurately during coaching sessions. During the coaching phase mentioned later, they should use adult learning principles to adhere to the executive's learning styles. Last, a good coach should facilitate long-term development by establishing a long-term behavioral plan with the executive to follow after the coach leaves. While these are only a few of the coach's commitments to the coach-executive relationship, they are important to consider in the coaching process listed next.

Methods of Gathering Data

The first phase of coaching involves gathering lots of valuable data [v]. A good coach will gather not only a lot of data about a coach's behavior, leadership styles, and overall effectiveness, but they will go to many sources to get this data. This means that a coach will utilize personnel records, employees, top management, the board of directors, and last but not least the executive's opinions on their own behavior. It is important to gather data from multiple sources in order to get the best opinion about the executive. Once this occurs, a coach can eventually deliver 360-degree feedback where many employees provide the coach with feedback about the executive that can be relayed later. This feedback data is typically gathered using assessments. Last, coaches will conduct series of tests during this process in order to assess the coach's personality, leadership styles, attitudes, and values that will be a valuable asset towards future coaching steps.

The Feedback Process: What to Remember/Consider

After all of the data has been collected, it is time for the coach to analyze and explain all of the data to the coach in the form of delivering feedback. Now this can be a tough process because a lot of executives do not like to hear their flaws, but if feedback is delivered a certain way, then this process can become smooth. Focusing the feedback towards the executive's behaviors instead of towards the executive will help them digest the feedback better. It is also important to keep hope alive in this step meaning coaches must emphasize that change is not only possible, but feasible. Last, it is important that a coach not only focuses on where an executive needs to improve, but also on their strengths in order to maintain the coach's confidence. After the coach delivers all of the feedback, the executive and the coach develop behavioral objectives that the coach can help the executive reach during the intervention phase listed next.

Coach!

Finally the coach gets to guide/coach the executive through change interventions. During these interventions coaches organize sessions where they can monitor an executive's progress. There are many different ways to coach an executive. Regardless, a coach wants to make sure to discuss how an executive can combat with their poor attitudes, how to release anxiety, find out what goes on in the organization to prompt bad behavior, and how to change their behavior. One example is a behavioral approach where coaches note down the correct and incorrect behaviors the executive performs. Coaches will reinforce the good behaviors by giving praise when an executive engages in appropriate behaviors that fit the behavioral objectives formed in the feedback phase. They will also punish bad behaviors via feedback and remind the executive of what the behavioral objectives are. Although many coaches use a behavioral approach to improve an executive's behavior, it is important that coaches treat the root of the behavioral problem using

different techniques listed earlier. Coaches will often utilize the executive's superior during this phase to help review the coach's progress and support their changes along the way. It is important that the coach finds optimal progress in the executive before ending the coaching sessions. This means that a coach must not only find that the executive has changed their behavior, but that they have also discovered their interdependence with others in their organization. Once the coach explains how the executive has changed, then the coach will give advice on how to maintain their new behaviors without the coach's help.

Evaluate Progress

The evaluation process happens after the coaching session, when the executive has changed their behavior. In this phase the coach analyzes how the progress during the coaching sessions went and how the coach has progressed since the sessions ended. The evaluative phase can occur immediately after the coaching sessions or later down the road, but either way it is a good idea for the coach to follow up with the coach to analyze how the progressed. In order to evaluate the details of the coaching session, the coach can collect data from the executive on their learning experiences and on how the sessions affected their leadership styles and overall effectiveness in the organization. No matter how the coach collects data and analyzes the progress, it is important for them to show the coach their progress and explain how to continue to progress in the future.

Diversity in Executive Coaching

There are many things that cause resistance to change for employees, leadership, executives, and the like. One of these things are lack of awareness about diversity and not encouraging diversity in the workplace. One diversity piece especially used in coaching is raising awareness about different personalities and perspectives of employees, team members, and other leaders. A coach will help their coachee to understand these differences and implications around them. When leaders do not encourage diversity in the workplace, they fall prey to many organizational potential pitfalls like higher turnover, less creativity, low decision making capabilities, and higher dysfunction in teams to name a few. In a nut shell, diversity can make or break an organization, and coaches specialize in helping executives to realize this and be proactive.

Conclusion

Coaching is growing more and more popular and it is important to hire a coach who is competent and has legitimate coaching skills[vi]. Only these coaches can help executives get where they need to be and help them learn how to change to better affect their organizations. While change is often a long and difficult process, it is a coach's job to guide executives through change and adapt to situations easier in the future. A lot is involved in coaching which partially includes some of the information mentioned in the phases listed earlier. Regardless, coaching is a profession that can help organizations and executives increase overall effectiveness to make room for a productive and more desirable workplace.

[i] Mace, M., & Mahler, W. R. 1958. *Developing executive skills*. New York: American Management Association.

[ii] Kombarakaran, F. A., Baker, M. N., Yang, J. A., & Fernandes, P. B. (2008). EXECUTIVE COACHING: IT WORKS!. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice & Research*, *60*(1), 78-90. doi:10.1037/1065-9293.60.1.78

[iii] McGovern, J., Lindemann, M., Vergara, M., Murphy, S., Barker, L., & Warrenfeltz, R. (2001). Maximizing the impact of executive coaching. *Manchester Review*, *6*(1), 2001.

[iv] The Executive Coaching Forum. (2005). The executive coaching handbook: Principles and guidelines for a successful coaching partnership. *The Executive Coaching Forum*. Retrieved from: http://www.theexecutivecoachingforum.com/

[v] Coutu, D., Kauffman, C., Charan, R., Peterson, D. B., Maccoby, M., Scoular, P., & Grant, A. M. (2009). What Can Coaches Do for You?. *Harvard Business Review*, *87*(1), 91-97.

[vi] Berglas, S. (2002). The very real dangers of executive coaching. *Harvard Business Review*, *80*(6), 86-93.