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Executive coaching moves from trend to new discipline

Colleges establishing standards, certification

Training for managers through sessions with an executive coach is nothing new for American companies. It's been happening for decades.

But using colleges and universities as a venue for teaching people how to become coaches?

That is a new trend in the Midwest, and two West Chester women are on the cutting edge of the movement.

Brenda Corbett and Judith Coleman, authors of "The Sherpa Guide: Process-Driven Executive Coaching" (Thomson/South-Western; 2006) and founders of West Chester's Sherpa Coaching, have been tapped by three universities in the Midwest to teach people how to be executive coaches.

The initiative brings structure to efforts to train executive coaches, Corbett says.

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ZOOM

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Brenda Corbett (right), an executive coach, "Sherpa" coaches client Stefan Ries, director of marketing, CDO Technologies Inc., as he works on an organizational chart of his business. The coaching helps clients solve business problems.

"Certification of coaches is so nebulous right now," said Corbett. "There's absolutely no foundation. So many universities are saying that this is what has to happen, that if you want to coach and be certified, then you have to have a process, a standard."

The University of Cincinnati, the University of Louisville and Kent State University have hired Corbett and Coleman to lead coaching certification efforts at their institutions this spring.

Clearly, teaching people how to be an executive coach is a growing trend at top universities and colleges in the U.S. Harvard, Northwestern, Stanford and Columbia show a 37 percent increase in the number of executive-education programs at those universities or colleges in seven years: from 211 programs in 1998 to 289 programs in 2005.

Corbett taught an executive coaching class at Xavier University last fall and found three types of students:

Executives, many laid off or taking early retirement, were looking to share their knowledge and generate income by creating a coaching consulting firm.

Some experienced coaches with a steady client roster were looking for guidance on how to develop a more formal coaching structure.

Companies that have an executive coach sent the coach to school to broaden their perspective.

"People involved in this field have to commit a tremendous amount of time and energy to it," Corbett said. "Many are starting their own business from the ground up."

UC will have an open house for its Executive Coaching Certification program on Monday at 3:30 p.m. and Wednesday at 10:30 a.m. at French Hall on the main campus.

Tuition is \$1,900 per student for the 101-level course and \$5,600 per student for the 201-level course.

A REVENUE STREAM

Executive education, the non-degreed corporate-development arm at UC's College of Business, is in many ways a continuing education effort for managers, which includes consulting, training and help with personal development, said Phill Rosenzweig, program director of executive education for the college.

"Our clients have been asking for executive coaching, and the first step is to make sure that qualified executive coaches are available," Rosenzweig said.

Coaching tomorrow's leaders

With a generation of business executives poised to retire in the upcoming decade, a wave of business consultants has emerged to "coach" the next generation of leaders.

Coaching just one key executive in an organization can change dozens if not hundreds of lives of the employees who work under that person for the better, according to Brenda Corbett.

Corbett, a co-author of "The Sherpa Guide: Process-Driven Executive Coaching" (Thomson/South-Western; 2006) with Judith Coleman, seeks to create a standard for training people to become executive coaches.

Chapters in the 350-page book highlight:

The importance of body language and eye contact.

Why agendas help chart coaching paths.

How 12 one-hour meetings can revitalize companies and people.

Why others' perceptions of the client can color reality.

Cash is another reason universities are focusing on the continuing-education needs of executives and managers, according to Karen Otazo, an executive coach and author of "The Truth About Managing Your Career ... And Nothing But the Truth" (Pearson/Prentice Hall; 2006).

"It is a wonderful revenue stream," Otazo said. "It is so much more remunerative than other programs."

Also, companies need well-rounded executives, and coaches can help make that happen by focusing on and correcting a manager's personal or professional flaws.

"Some executives go into these programs kicking and screaming," Otazo said.

Before long, though, most get it. Why? Because it makes sense for leaders to know how to get followers.

"They understand that these programs make a difference in getting work done through others," she said.