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Executive coaching changing as economy shifts

By Judith Coleman and Brenda Corbett

Every crisis calls for great leadership. Today, a generation of leaders is being severely tested. One bad decision, even one bad attitude in top management can cost people their jobs. That's why executive coaching is essential for leaders at every level.

As leaders look to improve their organizations, they must pay particular attention to developing those who will follow them and to creating new rising stars. Executive coaching is designed to aid those transitions.

It's not always clear to everyone what coaching really is. Many consultants, trainers, mentors and counselors are jumping on the bandwagon, using the term 'coach' to describe their work. We define executive coaching as regular meetings between a business leader and a trained facilitator, designed to produce positive changes in business behavior in a limited time frame.

This definition clarifies who coaches are (trained facilitators, not consultants, counselors, trainers or mentors), what coaches do (produce positive change in business behavior), and when things happen (on a set schedule within a certain time frame).

As a general rule, executive coaches, do not share their own experience, as do mentors; they do not give advice, as do consultants; they do not impart specific knowledge as trainers do; and they avoid personal issues, which fall under the guidance of a counselor or therapist.

Who Gets a Coach?

In the early days of coaching, an executive who wasn't living up to expectations was the most likely candidate for coaching. Today, most coaching is devoted to developing leadership skills, and a smaller share of coaching is designed to address specific problems. As a result, having an executive coach is

more of a status symbol, the mark of an up-and-coming leader being groomed for greater possibilities.

According to a survey we do annually, for the past four years the use of coaching primarily for leadership development has increased from 43 percent to 50 percent, while coaching to address a specific problem or challenge dropped from 37 percent down to 32 percent. A smaller group of coaching clients is in transition, such as promotions, transfers and new hires.

Demographics of Coaches

Executive coaches are an independent breed. Almost half the executive coaches we surveyed were one-person shops, and another 30 percent reports a company size of two to five people. There are more veteran coaches among smaller firms (100 employees or less) than among larger firms.

The field of coaching seems to be stabilizing. Looking at executive and life coaches as a group, the number of five-year veterans is growing, and new entrants form a smaller percentage of the industry.

Executive coaches starting out earn around \$60K. Executive coaches in business five years earn twice that. Many executive coaches, whether self-employed or within an organization, study with world-leading educators in order to earn recognized certification for executive coaches. We offer several courses on university campuses, including TCU.

Both men and women can carve out a career in executive coaching. Female executive coaches, on average, are 49 years old, while men's average age is 53.



Corbett and Coleman at TCU, 2007 speaking tour

Live and in Person

The delivery of both executive coaching and training for coaches is moving toward in-person encounters. Despite improved remote communication, in-person coaching is gaining in favor as the most effective delivery method.

Our survey showed us that in-person delivery accounts for more coaching than any other method: 47 percent of the total, up from 40 percent in 2006. We also found that 73 percent of executive coaches believe in-person delivery is most effective, a figure that has increased every year since 2006. In addition, 92 percent of HR professionals and coaching clients believe in-person delivery is the most effective.

Women coach by phone more often than men, and they have stronger opinions about the phone as a delivery method. Women coach on the phone almost 40 percent of the time. In fact, 34 percent of women feel it's the best way to coach. Men coach by phone 37 percent of the time, but only 17 percent feel it is most effective.

Thinking about hiring an executive coach, increasing your coaching skills, or beginning a career in executive coaching . . . the more you know about coaching, the better your results. You can read the complete 2009 Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey in the knowledge base at www.sherpacoaching.com.

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The 2009 survey was conducted by Sherpa Coaching, an executive coach training and certification body in Cincinnati, Ohio, and sponsored by the executive education programs at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, and the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia.

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