



Performance Matters

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Newsletter

Coaching Leaders for Change

How do you convince leaders to change? How can you optimize their talents and potential?

Executive coaching offers a tremendous opportunity to leverage leadership talent and resources, both of which can steer an organization toward sustainable success. Coaching is no longer reserved for problem leaders. It is more frequently sought by top performers whose organizations value their management and growth potential.

Establishing Ground Rules

In the beginning, coaches must clarify the ground rules, calling attention to the following key areas:

1. **Confidentiality, expectations and commitment:** The coach must be clear about what will be shared with the leader's boss and what will be kept confidential. Aligning coaching goals with the organization's principal objectives is crucial.
2. **Reporting relationships:** There must be clarity among the organizational contact (boss or HR representative), coach and leader.

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Reach and Achieve Associates, a performance and development coaching, training and mentoring firm that specializes in helping companies access, coach and retain key talent. The programs are designed to develop, support and maximize the people resource of an organization.

Robin has facilitated presentations with groups of 150 or more, and has been a guest speaker for several well-known organizations, including the New York State Conference of Mayors, The Governor's Office of Employee Relations, and the New York State Society of Medical Assistants Annual Convention.

She co-authored the book *Maximize Your Mind; Peak Your Potential* available on her web site.

Her article "Ethics in Sales" was published in the HRDQ Press.

For a complete listing of products and services visit our web sites at:

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Establishing Ground Rules

3. **Methods of information gathering:** Key stakeholders, team members, direct reports and others involved will be contacted by both the coach and the leader.
4. **Making judgments, setting objectives and monitoring progress:** The coach helps the leader and key stakeholders maintain objectivity. Coaches must focus on one or two behaviors, without judgment, and facilitate honest sharing about progress.
5. **How, why and when the coaching will end:** Coaching parameters must be set at the beginning of the engagement, with milestones for assessing progress and a completion date (usually 12 to 18 months).

It is critical to clarify at the outset *who the client is*. When the coach and leader understand that the company is the actual client, then the ground rules are easier to accept. Once the ground rules have been established, they cannot be bent along the way.

Measuring Success

Success *isn't* measured by:

- How well the leader performs with the coach's help. It must be judged on how well he or she performs *after* the coach has left the scene.
- How leaders feel about their own progress. It must be judged on the *changes* stakeholders perceive.
- The leader's positive feelings toward, and relationship with, the coach—a natural byproduct of a successful coaching engagement. True success is measured by demonstrated results.

Measuring Sustainable Success

Involving Key Stakeholders

The coach will ask key people involved in the leader's performance to participate in the coaching process, requesting direct help in four critical arenas:

1. **Let go of the past.** Key stakeholders must agree to focus on a future that can improve, as opposed to a past that cannot.
2. **Be helpful and supportive—not cynical, sarcastic or judgmental.** If people don't give the leader a chance, he or she will stop trying.
3. **Tell the truth.** Key stakeholders are advised not to gloss over or embellish reports.
4. **Choose an area for self-improvement.** The leader must be very open about what he or she is going to change. As part of the process, he/she will ask for ongoing suggestions. Stakeholders, too, will be asked to select an area for self-improvement and to solicit suggestions. This makes the process a two-way street.

Steps in the Behavioral Coaching Process:

Research indicates that if leaders fail to complete these basic steps, they probably will not improve:

1. Allow leaders to be involved in determining desired behaviors.
2. Let leaders assist in identifying key stakeholders.
3. The coach will collect feedback by interviewing key stakeholders and using 360-degree rating systems.

Behavioral Coaching Process

4. Determine key behaviors for change. Select only one or two key behaviors that will have the most positive impact on effective leadership.
5. Have the leader respond to key stakeholders. The leader should talk with each key stakeholder to collect additional suggestions on how to improve in the targeted areas.
6. Review what has been learned, and help the leader develop an action plan. After listening to suggestions, the leader must return with a plan describing what he or she wants to accomplish. The coach then provides encouragement.
7. Develop an ongoing follow-up process. Follow-up should be very efficient and focused on the future, incorporating questions like, *"Based upon my behavior last month, what ideas do you have for me for next month?"* Within six months, conduct a two- to six-item mini-survey with key stakeholders, asking whether the leader has become more or less effective in each targeted area for improvement.
8. Review results and start again. If the leader has taken the process seriously, stakeholders invariably report improvement. Build on this success by repeating the process for the next 12 to 18 months

Why Leaders Give Up

When it comes to change, some leaders lose motivation and fail to "stick with the program." Regardless of a coach's competence, failure to achieve goals may occur for several reasons:

1. Ownership: The more leaders feel the process is being imposed upon them or that they are just casually "trying it out," the less likely the coaching process will work.

2. Time: Goal setters have a natural tendency to underestimate the time needed to reach targets.

3. Difficulty: Goal setters' optimism applies to difficulty, as well. Not only does everything take longer than we think, it also requires hard work!

4. Distractions: Leaders have a tendency to underestimate the distractions and competing goals that will invariably surface in any given year. By planning for distractions in advance, leaders can set realistic expectations for change and, consequently, will be less likely to renounce the change process.

5. Rewards: Leaders tend to become disappointed when achievement of one goal doesn't immediately translate into achievement of other goals. If leaders think skills improvement will quickly lead to short-term profits, promotions or recognition, they may become disappointed and give up when these things fail to materialize instantaneously.

6. Maintenance: Once a leader has put forth the effort required to achieve a goal, it can be tough to maintain behaviors that incorporate the new changes. Leaders must recognize that professional development is an ongoing process, with a lifelong commitment.

Favorite Quotes

To be successful you must be balanced personally and professionally.
- Gary Sorrell

The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it's the same problem you had last year.
- John Foster Dulles

Keep on going and the chances are you will stumble on something, perhaps when you are least expecting it. I have never heard of anyone stumbling on something sitting down.
- Charles F. Kettering

"Our limitations and success will be based, most often, on our own expectations for ourselves. What the mind dwells upon, the body acts upon."
- Denis Waitley

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