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Passionate about the potential of individuals in their lives and their work environments, Kathleen Stinnett has focused on human growth and professional development since the mid-1980's. With an undergraduate degree in Business Administration and a master's degree in Training & Development, Kathleen has worked with organizations and individuals in a wide range of industries nationally and internationally.

“The fact of the matter is, the higher an individual moves in an organization, the less feedback he or she is likely to receive. Senior executives tend to get isolated from real-time, unvarnished feedback about the impact of their individual leadership.”

In February of 2000, Kathleen both received her certification as a professional coach from the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara and founded FutureLaunch, a consulting and coaching organization focused on personal growth with fulfillment. In addition to managing her own consulting and coaching practice, Kathleen serves on the leadership team of the Hudson Institute of Santa Barbara.

While not engaged in work she loves, Kathleen enjoys playing the piano, cooking gourmet meals, walking on the beach, and living with her partner Dave in Santa Barbara, California. Kathleen recorded a CD of original piano compositions in 2002 and loves performing and sharing this gift with others. To learn more, visit www.kathleenstinnett.com.

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Executive Coaching An Overview

What it is, how it works, challenges faced, return on investment.

The Context

“Imagine a professional football team that recruits the best players, puts them through training camp to hone their technical skills and learn the plays and strategies to win, and then plays the entire season without a practice session or a coach. Team owners would never expose a major investment to that kind of risk. Yet most organizations do just that.”

Witherspoon and White, 1996

managers and leaders who were very valuable but who had serious performance problems. If these individuals didn't get help, they would be on their way out of the organization.

Coaching sprang up as a way to “fix” these problem leaders.

The groups of people needing to be fixed usually fell into one of two categories: Those who were too aggressive in their interactions with others, and those who were too soft and gentle—and unable to make an impact in the organization.

These individuals got “sent” to coaching in the hopes that their behavioral problems would be minimized, if not eliminated. Coaches and coaching organizations were usually associated with fixing problem leaders, and therefore suffered from a dark shadow that was always associated with their work.

Over time, as coaching began to have positive results, organizations realized that coaching could prove valuable to other leaders—not just those with performance problems. Coaching evolved as a pathway to accelerate a “fast-tracker,” prepare a leader to step into a new position, or to assist in continuous performance efforts. This is where the field is today.

Another Theory

Richard Kilburg of Johns Hopkins University (1996) presents another theory regarding the origin of executive coaching: “...consultants started to practice executive coaching when they gained access to the leaders of organizations...executive

coaching appears to be an eclectic mix of concepts and methods that are being applied by a variety of consultants who have accepted assignments to work with individual executives. Traditional organization development methods, adult education, management training, industrial-organizational psychology, and generic consultation skills are being blended together to define a subdiscipline.”

What is Executive Coaching?

A definition of coaching

The definitions of executive coaching are probably as numerous and varied as the number of executive coaches in practice. The Professional and Personal Coaches Association defines coaching as “an ongoing relationship which focuses on the client taking action toward the realization of their vision, goals, or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client's level of awareness and responsibility and provides the client with structure, support and feedback” (Belf, 1995).

Groups of clients

Current literature suggests that executive clients generally fit into distinguishable groups:

Likely candidates for advancement: These individuals are seen by organizational sponsors as leaders who would benefit from grooming and preparation for a likely promotion.

“The fact of the matter is, the higher an individual moves in an organization, the less feedback he or she is likely to receive. Senior executives tend to get isolated from real-time, unvarnished feedback about the impact of their individual leadership.”

Saporito, 1996

History of Executive Coaching

How it Began

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, organizations such as Personnel Dimensions, Inc. (PDI) became pioneers in the coaching business as they worked with individuals in intensive, remedial efforts to fix serious performance problems. Client organizations began to realize that they had top

Coaching is the art of guiding another person or group toward fulfilling futures. The coaching process is fundamentally developmental. The work is future oriented and task driven. Coaching helps clients invent changes that are valuable, exciting and intensely personal. Most coaching is one-on-one coaching, based on a relationship of trust and shared values. There are explicit tasks that coaches often perform in various settings and circumstances.

A coach helps a client see options for becoming a more effective human being. A coach helps to grow strong persons, committed work teams, dynamic work systems and sustainable communities that function from the grass roots up. Effective coaches model the future because they are willing to invent it, design it, and insist on it.

Leaders “in trouble”: These individuals are possible “derailment” candidates. They are seen as having considerable corporate value and potential, yet need some assistance in their leadership performance.

Solid performers desiring increased performance: These strong senior players are performing well, and could be even stronger leaders with some coaching assistance.

Strong leaders who have “lost their smile”: A few executive coaches are focusing on the fulfillment side of the equation—working with individuals who are performing well, but who have stopped experiencing joy in their work.

Other interesting facts (to know and share)

A survey of coaching practices in American organizations revealed that people receiving coaching “may be anyone from a \$60,000 middle manager up to the CEO, although more commonly that person will be a leading contender for the CEO’s job” (Smith, 1993, p. 126).

Since it began catching on in 1995, coaching has grown to the point where some 70 percent of the top 1,000 firms worldwide do some form of it (interview of David Peterson by Mary Kane).

Typical Goals of Executive Coaching

Richard Kilburg of Johns Hopkins University (1996) defined some typical goals of executive coaching engagements. These have been modified below:

1. Increase the range, flexibility, and effectiveness of the client’s behavioral repertoire
2. Increase the client’s capacity to manage an organization—planning, organization, staffing, leading, controlling, cognitive complexity, decision making, tasks, jobs, roles, etc.
3. Improve client’s psychological and social competencies, including:
 - Psychological and social awareness and understanding
 - Tolerance of ambiguity
 - Develop and maintain effective interpersonal relationships within a diverse workforce
 - Awareness and knowledge of motivation, learning, group dynamics, organizational behavior
 - Capacity to learn and grow
 - Stress management skills and stress hardness
 - Not acting out emotions and other

psychodynamic patterns

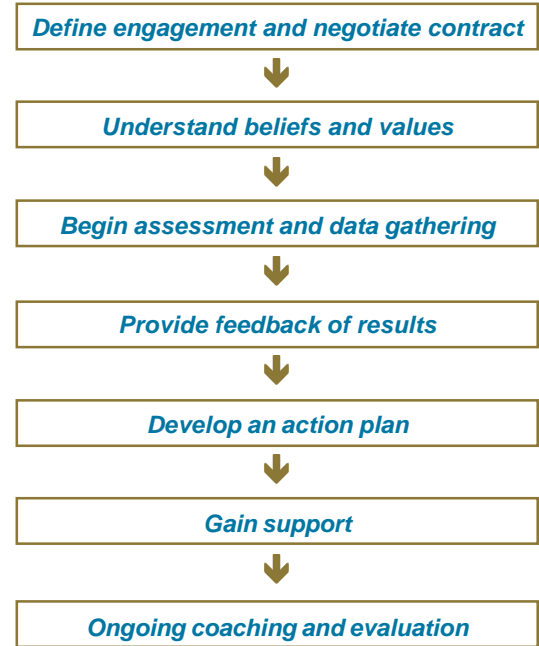
4. Manage self and others in conditions of change, crisis, and conflict
5. Manage career and advance professionally
6. Maintain balance: Manage tensions between organizational, family, community, and personal needs and demands
7. Improve the effectiveness of the organization or team

What’s missing

Most of the research that informed this paper did not mention the need to look at fulfillment issues: helping executives “find their smile”—and their purpose.

A Typical Process

While organizations approach executive coaching in several different ways, most approaches follow similar steps.



Define engagement and negotiate contract

While contracting is a critical step in any coaching engagement, defining the coaching intervention often takes on a level of complexity in an executive engagement. In many situations, the coach must meet with the sponsoring client, the individual’s boss, and/or a representative from Human Resources *prior* to meeting with the individual coaching client. During this meeting, the coach must clearly discover the sponsoring client’s goals for the coaching engagement as well as how the sponsoring client(s) might want to be involved in the process.

After the initial meeting with the sponsoring client(s), the coach will meet with the individual coaching client. Oftentimes, this meeting will also include the sponsoring client(s).

Much of the literature suggests that all feedback related to the individual coaching client remains confidential to that individual. Information that is shared with the sponsoring client is usually done with the individual client present.

Understand values and beliefs

Initial meetings between the coach and client will focus on understanding their client on a deeper level. Many executive coaches seek to understand the client in a holistic context—understanding their history and childhood; their current personal environment; their beliefs and values. This understanding may be obtained through interviewing the individual, observing them in their work and/or home environment, or interviewing others around the individual. Information on goals may also be uncovered through personal reflection, a written personal mission statement, or values clarification exercises.

Begin assessment and data gathering

Many executive coaches rely heavily on assessment as a basis for providing feedback to the client and identifying performance gaps. Assessment may occur through structured surveys and self-rating instruments or through informal one-on-one interviews with the client's colleagues, employees, friends, or family members.

Current literature suggests that much executive coaching focuses on the instrument(s) as a way to facilitate the coaching conversations. While 360° (multi-rater) feedback instruments are clearly a popular choice among coaches, many coaches supplement the 360° assessment with other instruments. Among those listed in research are:

- 16PF
- Adjective Checklist (ACL)
- FIRO-B
- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)
- Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI)
- Picture Story Exercise (a TAT-like, six-picture protocol providing self-report data regarding motives)
- Strength Deployment Inventory
- Team management instruments (not specified)
- Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (or some of its subtests)
- Wonderlic Personnel Test

Provide feedback on results

A critical step throughout the coaching process is for the coach to provide feedback to the client.

Most often this feedback comes from the myriad of assessment instruments or processes being employed by the coach. Often, this feedback is “doled out” over the length of the coaching intervention.

The coach usually begins the coaching intervention with some initial assessment and feedback. Then, throughout the coaching engagement, the coach would determine when additional assessment and the related feedback would further a particular individual in his or her developmental path. Executive coaches employed by coaching/consulting organizations would obviously follow that particular organization's standard practices – with some room for customizing the coaching intervention to meet a client's specific needs.

Develop an action plan

Through a deep understanding of the client's goals and developmental needs, the organizational context, the assessment feedback, and the client's style, the coach and client work together to craft a living action plan that will stretch and grow the client. This action plan is revisited throughout the coaching engagement and expanded or modified as needed.

The action plan is often shared with the sponsoring client(s) in a joint meeting with the individual client.

Gain support

In many instances, an executive client must gain support from one or many people in his or her surrounding environment. A coach is usually not effective or ineffective in a vacuum, but rather exists in a system environment. Therefore, the coach and client may seek support from others in the system—whether colleagues, direct reports, family members, or more senior managers and executives.

Support may appear in the form of honest feedback, participation in group feedback sessions, or courageous conversations with the individual who is trying to develop. In some situations, simply informing these system members that the executive is trying to make positive changes influences the system environment.

Ongoing coaching and evaluation

Ongoing coaching and evaluation may occur in many ways over varying periods of time. Some executive coaches like to structure regular meetings on a bi-monthly or quarterly basis. The meetings would involve not only the coaching client, but perhaps the sponsoring client, colleagues, or direct reports as well.

Other executive coaches report a more flexible fluid manner of conducting follow-up. The schedule of ongoing coaching would be jointly

“I want to make some significant changes in my life/career...and I'm not sure where to start.”

“How can I channel my energy into work that I'm passionate about—work that really fulfills me?”

“I want to make a bigger difference than I'm making now. How do I do that?”

“I crave more balance in my life—how can I juggle all of the balls in the air and still save time for me?”

“I want to become a stronger leader. I'd like to work with someone who will help me leverage my strengths and better understand and manage my blind spots.”

If you find yourself asking any of these questions, you may benefit from working with a coach—someone who can guide you to a stronger future, help you to identify and articulate your own learning edges, and implement plans to reach your desired future vision.

determined with the client, depending on the individual person, his or her progress and development, and the degree of change needed in a particular time frame.

Challenges in Coaching Executives

Earning the trust

Many executives have been successful in the past because they are good at driving business results—focusing on numbers and the bottom line. They may not see the value of focusing on the “softer” side of leadership. To the extent that coaching represents that “softer” side, executives may approach coaching with some skepticism or even disdain.

Earning the trust of the executive may not be an easy task. Fortunately, it can be done.

Organizations such as KRW consulting have found that “developing an expertise about the individual client, through extensive data collection, is one of the most effective ways to build the needed relationship. Executives respect good data and generally respect people who take the time to do their homework” (Kiel, et. al., 1996).

Making development a priority

An equally challenging task is to help these busy clients recognize the value of making development a priority, especially when they have so many other demands on their time.

Executives often have sponsors within the organization who make very clear the overall goals of the coaching assignment. This organizational support can help influence the executive, especially when the coaching intervention includes check-ins with the sponsoring individuals.

To the extent that the executive implements new behaviors in existing job situations and begins to experience successes, the executive will be more likely to continue the new behaviors.

Having a business understanding

Not only must a coach be versed in psychological dynamics and coaching fundamentals, he or she must also be able to speak the executive’s language in terms of business acumen and organizational

priorities. To the extent that the coach can anchor the coaching to the business initiatives, the executive will more easily see the relevance and importance of the coaching.

Harry Levinson (1996) suggests that “one must have a broad understanding of the business and government worlds, which requires that he or she be widely read and contemporarily knowledgeable...one must also be knowledgeable about the political world and its implications for the organization with which one is working.”

The Return on Investment

Some Typical Results

In recent years organizations have attempted to calculate the return on investment (ROI) of executive coaching. While few studies can be found, those that exist point to very positive results.

In 2001, the Manchester Review documented their study to evaluate the effectiveness of executive coaching. Of 100 executives studied (34% female, 66% male), the following facts were reported:

- 86 percent ranked their coaching experience as “very satisfied” or “extremely satisfied.”
- 73 percent of participants considered they had achieved their goals “very effectively” or “extremely effectively.”
- Using very conservative methods for establishing a return on investment, the average participant reported an ROI of \$100,000, or 5.7 times the initial investment.

In their book *Rethinking The Sales Force: Redefining Selling to Create and Capture Customer Value*, Neil Rackham and John DeVincents quote:

- “Training alone, without substantial reinforcement through coaching, has a disappointingly small impact. A well-integrated combination of training and coaching can enable average salespeople to improve their performance dramatically.”
- “Even when the coaching is less carefully implemented, a study of 1,000 coached salespeople showed revenue increases of 17 percent compared with uncoached control groups. In the excellent sales forces we’ve worked with over the years, a strong coaching culture has been a hallmark of their success.”

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