

## Start with the end in mind

### How to pick the right coach for the job

BY MICHAEL DEVENNEY

When the CEO wants to hire a coach for executives, where does HR start? The executive coaching industry has exploded, resulting in more and more choices, but also a lack of consistency in credentials, licensing and approach. How can one tell who and what will work?

The key is to make the subjective as tangible as possible by starting with the end in mind. Clarify the end result, find out who the coach is and determine how the process will work.

To define the desired outcome, ask the CEO or the individual initiating the hiring what the key challenges, opportunities and capabilities are. Knowing the hoped-for results helps select the coaching method. Ask prospective coaches their specialty and beware the generalist or the coach who is an expert in every area.

As in any other hiring process, do some digging. Check the coach's credentials, experience and education to determine the right match.

- Is the coach licensed by a recognized association? Organizations such as the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and CoachU certify coaches based on education and hours of professional coaching.

- Does the coach have more than three years of experience? Coaches who are professionally certified track their hours of coaching experience and need at least 700 paid hours to receive a

professional coaching designation and more than 2,000 paid hours for a master certification.

- Does the coach have a background in the organization's business or industry? Past experience is extremely helpful in developing a rapport with the executive.

The first two steps help clarify what and who. In step three of the selection process, an organization should explore how the coaching is actually provided. Look for a model incorporating the following five criteria.

**Assessment:** A coach needs to identify the executive's natural strengths and the best approach to work with. Ask coaches what type of assessments and exercises they use and whether they provide a tangible and reliable picture of how someone works. Have the coach show examples of the assessments and reports and find out how they're used to support development. Seek supporting research for the assessment's viability. Ask how accurate the tool is in describing the participant's behaviour and make sure the assessment tool has a smaller variance over a longer period of time.

Ask the coach whether his approach includes not just the executive but also those who work around that executive. Ignoring the people around the executive can result in slow or no progress.

**Honest feedback:** Executives can only grow through coaching if they are challenged. Look for someone who combines questions with opinions. Executives can be surrounded by people who are quick to agree with them and, as a result, can be-

come isolated from alternative viewpoints. Coaches should provide honest comments and push back when needed to help executives become leaders.

**Results:** Being able to measure results from coaching inspires confidence in the program. The coach should be able to measure and show the return on investment of time, energy and money. Ask to see what reports the coach will use to show progress. The measures may be very clear in some situations — time, money, and other specific actions — but they can also be open to perspective.

Taking the example of a coach working with an executive team. Let's say the CEO wants her employees to show greater initiative, better judgment and a greater capability to assess problems before they happen. To measure that, a coach might ask her for specific examples for each of these outcomes. She comes back with several examples, including protecting her time from internal issues, bringing solutions with a problem and meeting project timelines. The coach then asks her to rate the team on a simple scale of one to 10. The CEO's answer is a four, given her sense that her team is failing her and that she spends too much time putting out fires that should never have reached her desk.

The coach then goes to the team with outlines of the desired results and clear methods to achieve those results. This gives the team a better sense of what is required and, with a scorecard each month, a basis for dialogue on what works and where help is

needed. Six months later, the CEO is asked again to rate her team. She might give a score of seven, given the number of hours the team has freed up for her each week thanks to better handling of their responsibilities.

**Accountability:** The coach needs to provide accountability for progress. Coaches should help executives clarify their vision, focus on the drivers to realize that vision and support the follow-through actions to see results.

The coach should show the reports used to clarify the executive's goals and the actions to be taken and measured. Coaching should provide a way to assess what has been working and where something new is needed. Helping executives be accountable for their actions and results is one of the key roles of the coach.

**A process:** Look for a process, a path of development. Ask for a coaching proposal, one with clear end results and an outline of the steps and outcomes at each step. Flexibility is great but true change needs rails to keep people on track. Does the coach have a step-by-step process to support executives in developing their leadership? Does the coach use practical exercises and examples to help the executive to apply concepts to their own work?

Success in finding the right coach and achieving the right outcomes starts with the end in mind. Be clear on the results desired from coaching, focus on the background of the coach and execute with a coach who follows a process.

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