

What Is An Executive Coach?

Just as professional athletes use personal coaches to keep them focused and reaching new levels of performance, so too are corporate executives, professionals and high-level managers turning to executive coaches to help them attain new goals and accomplish more in their careers.

Executive coaching is a process that helps individuals break through perceived limits, which they believe are preventing them from advancing in their careers. These limits may include career advancement or leadership challenges, career transitions, and performance issues.

An executive coach helps create new standards of excellence through a dynamic learning process.

The coach's role is to support the client to reach for much more than they might ask of themselves, and identify and eliminate internal and external obstacles to their success.

The coach does this by direct requests to move to action, making suggestions or giving advice to go for an opportunity, or even suggesting that the client look at something that appears to be an underlying concern.

In short, the coach is an advocate, a catalyst, an accountability partner and compassionate truth teller, who will provoke with questions, hold up a mirror so the client can see both their strengths and weaknesses, celebrate successes, and help identify and leverage personal strengths.

For their part, the client is asked to list their personal and work priorities; be open to evolve personally and professionally; be willing to expand what they are willing to do; commit to balancing their work and personal lives; and be willing to complete the assigned tasks each week.

Once mutual trust and respect are developed, the learning process can begin and the coach draws upon their knowledge, skills and training to assist the client to achieve their desired outcomes.

Executive coaching has been proven to be an effective process for assisting corporate leaders to develop core competencies, new skills and habits and overall performance effectiveness. Topics include:



- Risk management strategies
- Non-judgmental feedback system
- Goal setting and monitoring
- Strategic thinking
- Career development
- Life balance (career and home)
- Leadership knowledge and skills
- Decision making and problem solving strategies
- Communication skills
- Business acumen and strategy

Although designed to help individuals improve professionally, the skills learned in corporate coaching have application in personal lives as well. For example, by learning to communicate better, one might be better prepared to resolve or avoid conflicts with family members.

Any professional could benefit from the right executive coach, but before one can make an informed decision about whether executive coaching is for them, it is important to have a clear understanding as to what an executive coach's function is and is not.

The coach's role is to motivate, provide feedback and offer suggestions to assist the client to make the best use of their own abilities.

Executive coaching is not therapy. A coach does not treat addictions, depression or mental or personality disorders. These areas are left to specialists in the appropriate fields.

One of the main outcomes of executive coaching is to help the individual increase their performance capacity. The executive will always determine what this is. The exact reasons for hiring a coach may vary, but the goal is the same: to increase performance by achieving determined outcomes.

Many executives who hire coaches know what needs to be done and what they must do. The roadblock often is getting motivated, finding a strategy that will provide a solution and then implementing it.

I call this state of being trapped in a loop of knowing and not doing the thinking vs. action roadblock.



This is often the result of not seeing the steps needed to gain traction to move forward.

One reason is time. There is no shortage of knowledge and know-how, but to navigate the thousands of leadership books and keep up with the newest leadership fads can be overwhelming.

Executive coaches make their living by staying well researched. This provides them with the resources and knowledge base to work with their clients to design and tailor dynamic, action-oriented strategies in one-on-one sessions.

Executive coaching begins with a consultation between coach and client, to first determine whether the two individuals are compatible and then to map out a course of follow-up sessions in 30- to 60-minute blocks on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Coaching can be done effectively via telephone, e-mail or in person. I favor telephone coaching, as it is more dynamic and flexible for the executive's busy schedule, and it is more personal than e-mail.

It is not uncommon to use a combination of all three strategies.

A typical coaching session begins with a review of the client's successes and wins since the last meeting or call, a look back at challenges they have faced and how they handled them, and a sharing of new awareness that has been experienced.

The client also may want to discuss any new opportunities they are attracting, and outline the outcome they are seeking for the session.

Finally, they will list goals to be reached by the next session and the challenges they want to work on next.

An executive coaching relationship may continue for months or even years, but I recommend for the individual to commit to the process for a minimum of eight to 12 months.

I find it often takes this period of time for the coaching relationship to evolve, for the client to learn new skills, to make progress and to lock in new behaviors.

Executive coaching is a powerful medium to provide leaders with one-on-one programs that are designed for their specific needs and circumstances.

Ultimately, it will be up to you to determine whether you can benefit from having an executive coach on your personal team.

