



Finding The Best Executive Coach: Top Ten Qualities To Look For

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Leadership development can be enhanced with the right coaching model and an experienced executive coach. Executive coaching is really about changing the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of an organization's key contributors, in order to help them perform at a higher level and derive greater satisfaction from their careers.

If you agree that leadership development is about challenging and changing attitudes and behaviors, then you would probably agree that the process is a psychological one that requires a great deal of training and finesse on the part of the coach. The executive coach must have advanced training in the behavioral sciences, which includes a broad understanding of how to apply behavioral change methods to the workplace.

What should one look for in a good executive coach? The coach must:

Possess strong rapport building and trust developing skills. An expert coach knows how to build trust with individuals at all levels of the organization. The coach is able to use effective listening skills to build a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. This goes way beyond the ability to understand business activity and is really about "understanding people."

Be a skilled diagnostician. We know that almost everyone brings their personal life and personal baggage into the workplace, so the coach must know how to harness and direct that energy. A coach must be able to discover and understand those issues and how they impact the workplace. An expert coach brings to the table the ability to accurately assess the barriers that prevent forward movement.

Know how to increase anxiety and positive motivation in order to accelerate the change process.

An expert executive coach knows that sometimes you need to "nudge" the coaching candidate to take a few risks and be open to new options. One way to accomplish such a goal is to increase their anxiety and thus their motivation to be successful.

Conduct a comprehensive assessment/audit relying on a detailed life interview, multi-rater feedback instruments, state-of-the-art objective tests, and performance data. An expert coach will utilize an effective goal setting and action planning strategy that is based on a comprehensive evaluation of the individual.

Utilize on-the-job "behavioral experiments" as the everyday method to drive behavioral change.

One of the best ways for someone to learn new skills is to "try them on" at work. A coach helps design "behavioral experiments" that challenge the candidate.



Develop a strong partnership between the candidate and a change partner. Expert coaches help the candidate discover and develop a partnership with a person who is there to provide encouragement and support and to celebrate successes. One goal of all coaching should be linking the candidate with someone that can be their mentor.

Show the candidate how to tap into their own motivations so that they can take ownership of the coaching process. An expert coach teaches the candidate how to discover the motivation and commitment to take the lead in determining the direction of the coaching.

Have a toolbox full of behavioral change techniques available to help build the energy required to achieve lasting performance enhancement. A coach has experience helping individuals change their behaviors. The coach can "dig" into a reservoir of techniques that can help create an environment conducive to positive change.

Know how to utilize adult learning theory to further the change process. An executive coach knows how to apply adult learning theory to the coaching process. Adults tend to learn the best through "active participation" in a skill building activity... a "behavioral experiment" in the workplace.

Know which behavioral patterns predict success and which ones predict derailment. An expert coach is constantly watching for behavioral patterns, looking for signs that predict success or derailment.

There are a few more qualities that I haven't listed, but this is a great place to start the discussion about executive coaching. Please take your time to evaluate all coaches before you hire one.