

Leadership Coaching



*Building Effective Organizations That Get **Results***

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Leadership Coaching

Leaders set the organizational agenda, influence culture, impact capacity and capability of employees, and inspire the organization to reach breakthrough performance. Leaders are central to organizational success, so it serves the organization well to provide development opportunities to ensure that leaders are working at their own individual best.

Leadership coaching goes beyond leadership training to focus on an individual leader's specific role in the organization and explore his or her unique strengths and weaknesses, challenges and opportunities, and motivation to be a great leader. The coaching process facilitates leaders' focus on improving or advancing in areas that will have the biggest impact on the business.

Who Should Seek A Leadership Coach?

Organizations have leaders at all levels, and leadership coaching can benefit all leaders. Leadership coaching can support high potential leaders seeking to improve their effectiveness to move into higher levels of leadership or assist leaders in addressing areas of development to reach desired levels of performance. Most importantly, leadership coaching helps leaders perform at their best so they can successfully lead the organization.

The Business Impact of Leadership Coaching

The International Coach Federation (ICF) notes multiple benefits of coaching such as fresh perspectives on personal challenges, enhanced decision-making skills, greater interpersonal effectiveness, increased confidence, improved productivity, greater satisfaction with life and work, and attainment of relevant goals. A study performed by PricewaterhouseCoopers reported the following statistics¹ (the percentage of study respondents who reported improvement due to their coaching experience):

- 70% improved work performance
- 61% improved business management
- 57% improved time management
- 51% improved team effectiveness
- 80% improved self-confidence to face challenges in meeting organizational demands
- 73% improved business relationships
- 72% improved communication skills
- 67% improved life/work balance

¹ International Coach Federation, www.coachfederation.org, Benefits of Using a Coach, Retrieved April 14, 2014, <http://www.coachfederation.org/need/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=747&navItemNumber=565>

Moreover, 86% of companies and individuals who hired a coach reported that they at least recouped their investment, 99% reported being “somewhat satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the coaching experience, and 96% reported that they would repeat the coaching process.

Choosing a Leadership Coach

First and foremost, a leadership coach must have the appropriate background in terms of educational degrees, experience, and professional association affiliations. Education and ongoing development ensures that the coach has the foundational knowledge on which to apply his or her coaching practice.

Because leadership coaching is conducted with an organization systems lens, it is important to select a coach who has experience working in various functional areas (e.g., sales, finance, HR, product development) as well as with leaders up and down the organizational hierarchy. These coaches can help leaders be more effective in their particular roles as they relate to the rest of the organization. Some leaders may prefer coaches with general knowledge of business while others want coaches with expertise in specific industries or functions. Coaches can describe the advantages and disadvantages of both and help the leader decide on the criteria most important to the leader’s success.

Once the requirements of education and experience have been met, the most important criterion for selecting a coach is the compatibility between coach and leader. Each coach has a unique style that reflects his or her own personality, strengths, and preferences. Sense of humor, degree of empathy, tone of voice, and body language may influence the chemistry between the coach and leader. The leader should feel that the coach positively pushes the leader to greater self-awareness and goal achievement. While the coaching sessions should stretch the leader, they should also be positive experiences that the leader enjoys. The first few sessions can be used as a pilot for ensuring an effective coach-leader match.

There are advantages and disadvantages to selecting one coach to work with all leaders within an organization. Besides the administrative ease of using a single coach, another benefit is that one coach working with many leaders will quickly become familiar with the organization’s players, strategic issues, and initiatives, allowing the coach to incorporate specific aspects of the leader’s work environment into the coaching sessions. A single coach working with many leaders will also be more prepared to conduct team coaching. (Organizations have found substantial benefit in having a coach work individually with leaders while coaching the entire leadership team to improve team performance.) The greatest disadvantage of using a single coach is that the coach’s style and experience may not be an ideal fit for all leaders. In this case, the coach may recommend colleagues who better meet a particular leader’s coaching needs.

Who Is Involved in Leadership Coaching?

Leader. The leader is the client in the coaching relationship. The leader must be motivated to improve his or her leadership effectiveness; prepared to reflect on his or her own values, assumptions, and behaviors as they affect others in the organization; and willing to experiment with new behaviors and attitudes to further leadership development. Most importantly, the leader must be willing to integrate learning from the coaching sessions into his or her day-to-day work.

Leader's Manager. Except for leaders at the very top of the organization, the leader's manager provides the resources and support for the leader to do the coaching work, which includes time for the coaching sessions as well as time to complete coaching assignments. The manager provides feedback in setting the leader's development goals as well as evaluating progress. The manager also may be asked to provide information as part of additional assessments to craft the development goals.

Coach. The coach's primary responsibility is to advance the leader's self-discovery to increase his or her leadership effectiveness. The coach presents insightful questions that encourage the leader to get to the heart of his or her assumptions and behaviors that promote or hinder success. As the coach facilitates the leader's growing awareness of his or her patterns of behavior, the coach supports the leader in identifying and adopting desired behaviors that will increase effectiveness. The coach shares specific concepts, models, and frameworks from management best practice to increase understanding of new behaviors. The coach supports the leader's self-accountability for meeting the development goals and monitoring progress against those goals.

The Coaching Process

The coaching process is an iterative 4-step process.

1. **Establish a coaching agreement.** The leadership coach prepares a draft agreement that specifies the following elements of the coaching relationship:
 - The frequency, duration, and location of coaching sessions
 - Confidentiality
 - Access to data and information collected during the coaching engagement
 - Scope of coaching
 - Cancellation policy

If the Human Resources function oversees the leadership coaching program for the organization, HR also provides input to the agreement. The leader and the leader's manager refine the draft agreement.

2. **Develop goals.** The coach and leader define the coaching goals; the leader's manager provides input and concurs with the final established goals. The leader, coach, and manager may determine that additional input is needed to develop goals. Techniques to collect data may consist of assessment tools, on-the-job observation, examination of performance reviews, or others. The coach helps the leader identify goals that will be highest leverage for the organization, linking those goals to desired business results.
3. **Provide coaching.** The coach meets with the leader according to the schedule established in the coaching agreement. Prior to each session, the leader completes a session preparation worksheet to review progress made since the last session and set expectations for the upcoming session. The coach supports the leader in becoming aware of his or her behaviors and impact of those behaviors. The coach engages the leader in dialogue and activities to achieve the desired changes.
4. **Monitor progress.** The coach works with the leader to monitor his or her own progress throughout the coaching engagement. The leader's manager completes a periodic evaluation to assess progress. This evaluation is discussed with the leader and the coach and used as input for refining development goals. The leader also provides regular feedback to the coach so that the partnership can evolve to best support the leader's development.

The Role of Human Resources in Leadership Coaching

If Human Resources (HR) is responsible for the organization's leadership coaching program, HR will contract with the leadership coach, confirm candidate leaders to receive coaching, and approve coaching agreements. The coach will regularly consult with HR about the coaching program to report whether or not the leader and leader's manager are participating as well as provide general feedback about the coaching program in the organization. No specific details of any coaching engagement will be discussed.

It is recommended that HR periodically ask the leader to evaluate the coaching program so HR can provide that feedback to the coach. The coach should be evaluated on the following:

- Helping the leader develop clear, realistic goals that will increase business results
- Supporting the leader to become aware of strengths and areas for improvement
- Facilitating dialogue and activity to empower the leader to leverage strengths and adopt new behaviors
- Sharing relevant concepts and models at appropriate times to support leadership development
- Monitoring progress and leader accountability to goals

Human Resources can analyze the evaluations to improve the coaching program organization-wide.

Scope of Leadership Coaching

Leadership coaching is intended to support leaders who want to make the necessary changes to improve their leadership effectiveness and, consequently, business results. It is important to differentiate leadership coaching from training, mentoring, and psychotherapy.

Training helps people build skills. Coaching helps people become aware of their own behaviors and the impact of those behaviors on others. Coaching is very helpful in supporting the leader to apply new leadership skills directly to the leader's specific work environment and can be conducted in conjunction with leadership training.

Mentors serve as role models, advice-givers, influencers, and networkers. While mentors may support their mentees in understanding themselves better, mentors' many other roles are outside of the boundaries of the role of a coach.

It is important for leaders to bring their whole selves to the self-discovery process, and that often means that leaders will bring some elements of their personal lives to the coaching sessions. This is encouraged as behaviors the leader has targeted to change in the work environment may be related to behaviors that are influenced from home or other parts of the leader's life. However, coaching is forward-looking and action-focused and does not involve treating family issues or psychological issues. Should the coach identify treatment issues, the leader will be referred to the organization's Employee Assistance Program.

Ending a Coaching Agreement

Coaching agreements are written for a specific period of time, typically 4-6 months. If the leader or coach no longer feels that progress is being made, the relationship can be terminated earlier. If HR owns the overall leadership coaching contract with the coach, then the contract may also be terminated per the contract terms.

Many coaching agreements are renewed so that leaders can continue to work on additional goals. Additionally, once a coach has worked with a particular leader, coaching agreements may be drafted to allow for coaching sessions as needed.

ABOUT MARISA SANCHEZ, PhD. Organization development improves the functioning of individuals, teams, and organizations. Change management applies organization development principles to facilitate change. With over 20 years of consulting experience in these disciplines, Dr. Sanchez focuses on helping leaders *build effective organizations that get results.*

Her consulting approach uniquely focuses on achieving results by integrating deep knowledge and expertise in organization development, project management, and business strategy. She works effectively with executives and senior managers, project managers, and information technologists who appreciate her performance-based, results-focused approach. She draws on a variety of business and organization development models and tools to support leadership development, strategic planning and execution, organization design, and team coaching.

Dr. Sanchez earned her Doctorate of Philosophy in Human and Organization Systems from Fielding Graduate University, Master of Business Administration from Georgetown University, and Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Psychology from Duke University.

She has written on a number of organizational topics, including interorganizational collaboration, change management, and leadership coaching (www.marisa-sanchez.com/research/). She serves as Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Organization Development Network and is a member of the International Association of Coaches as well as Women in Technology.