

# **Executive Coaches Aren't Only for Execs Anymore**

*By Donna Rawady, Executive Coach*

You might think that an executive coach works exclusively with executives, but that's not always the case. In addition to investing in executive-level employees, many organizations are providing one-on-one customized consulting and coaching for their directors, middle managers and, in some cases, individual contributors. Coaching may serve as an investment in a gifted young professional earmarked for promotion, a tenured employee in a new or evolving role, or a director-level employee on the way to vice president.

Individuals are investing in coaching outside of the corporate arena as well. Small business owners are working with coaches to more effectively market and grow their businesses. People in transition are hiring coaches to help them explore their career interests and options and to promote themselves in a competitive job market.

Think of a coach as a personal trainer, helping you work toward your potential strength in the professional area of your choice, with mutual respect and trust as the basis of the relationship. And, as with a personal trainer, everyone can benefit if they're seeking the support.

Howard Shenson refers to the coaching and consulting role eloquently in his book *Shenson on Consulting* (John Wiley & Sons Inc. in association with University Associates, \$24.95): "More than anything, clients retain consultants with the assumption (hope) that they will be dedicated to placing the client's interest and well-being above and beyond any other interest, even their own self-interest."

This was reiterated for me when I hired a coach years ago — Jim Norman — to help me assess and brand my business. He responded to me after I complimented a strategy he was using while marketing his services, and he wrote: "Feel free to plagiarize anything of mine for your own effort." So it's understandable why individuals in varied roles would seek out and invest in this level of service and support.

But having an executive coach may not be for everyone. Or, more accurately, the time may not be right for everyone. In order for executive coaching to work for you, you would need to personally sense or feel a need for change or improvement, or have a desire to be proactive about maintaining your success strategies.

Interestingly, even when a need is clearly identified by others, the coachee must internalize the need in order to be a strong candidate to benefit from a coaching relationship. If you are interested in exploring further, here are a few quick guidelines:

- Ask around. Your colleagues may know of a good coach.
- Interview more than one candidate before making any commitments, as every coach is not a good match for every need.
- Prepare to be candid and share your needs and hopes for outcomes from the coaching relationship.
- Ask for client referrals and/or testimonials.
- Feel free to ask for the proposed coaching or consulting plan and anticipated investment in writing before you make your choice.
- Be sure that you feel that there is a comfortable, yet professionally stimulating, chemistry between you, and that you share similar philosophies.

- Regardless of your role or level, there are coaching resources available to provide you with the customized development you may be seeking.

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