Coaching Quicksand: Avoiding Hidden Dangers that can Trap the Best of Us

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Chuck, a bright, caring, "can do" executive reported to the COO of a billion dollar high tech company. New to his job, Chuck wanted to rebuild the morale in his organization as well as produce breakthrough results in his first year. As this was also his first position at the corporate officer level, he accepted a colleague's recommendation, and engaged an experienced and empathetic executive coach to assist him with his professional development. Chuck immediately established rapport with his coach and they began to meet weekly, in 2-hour sessions.

Chuck began involving his coach in the day-to-day work of his organization, and included him in a 2-day planning offsite at a resort. After defining the staff's initiatives for the coming fiscal year, Chuck asked his coach to follow up and ensure all staff members were completing their work.

The coach met weekly with each staff member encouraging, urging and cajoling them to get their projects done. Surprisingly, these normally results-oriented managers dragged their heels and rumors spread that they resented the coach's "interference." They wanted to work closer with Chuck who was not only their boss but also a very supportive individual.

Chuck's boss was growing dissatisfied with him due to deliverables being missed. He didn't think Chuck was handling key details of the business adequately. Aware that the COO had concerns, the coach, on his own initiative, went to the COO to have a conversation regarding his concerns with Chuck.

Chuck was embarrassed that his coach had gone to his boss without telling him and was upset at what occurred at the meeting. The coach had chastised the COO for not being clearer with Chuck about his concerns. The COO believed he had been quite clear with Chuck and was angry that the coach had implied otherwise. He was also frustrated that Chuck had spent an extraordinary amount of money in just 6 months on his coaching activities, but had not focused on the issues his boss thought were essential to his success.

Chuck was increasingly aware he was alienating key stakeholders by his failure to create proper roles and boundaries for his coach. Neither his staff nor his boss was happy with the way Chuck was utilizing his executive coach. The coach's contract was terminated.

The above story demonstrates how an executive coaching experience, the intent of which is to ensure an executive's effectiveness and success can spiral downward to disaster with just a few ill-considered decisions. Executive coaching is still a relatively new and uncontrolled discipline, and is increasing in popularity as one way to help executives build their skills and develop perspective. Both the potential and the peril of executive coaching are discussed in the following pages.

Our purpose is to ask questions that are essential to creating a successful coaching experience for all the relevant stakeholders (the coach, the executive and the organization). The final" answers to these procedural, conceptual, logistical structural and policy questions are still in process for most organizations. Beyond the many questions, we offer two items that are missing from the current discussions.

First, a sample corporate policy statement to guide the creation and management of executive coaching relationships is offered as a starting point for discussion of organizational issues. Second, we offer a proposed handout for corporate executives as a guideline for shaping their expectations about what to anticipate in their coaching experience. We hope this combination of questions, answers, policies and guidelines deepen the ongoing dialogue within both companies and professionals interested in the field of executive coaching.

<u>Change is the one constant</u>

A decade ago, it was news for executives to hear that the business environment was rampant with change. Now it is axiomatic, and Peter Vaill's prediction of a work world that is essentially "permanent whitewater" has become the widely accepted truth for the foreseeable future. When asked recently to describe their work lives, a typical group of high tech leaders responded with descriptors like "dynamic, stressful, so many confusing choices, surprises, no rest between challenges, constant stretch, demand for new skills in new circumstances, high degrees of uncertainty and fun." Change has become the one constant for individuals and organizations.

<u>Change is accelerating</u>

It is not just change but the seemingly ever-accelerating rate of change that, combined with increased complexity in jobs, business environment, competition and technology, has left many executives shaking their heads over how much more difficult it is to "win" in their jobs. Diversity, global consciousness, new methodologies and process requirements, rigorous quality standards, and continuous short term financial measures have challenged executives to become better at both the human and the technical aspects of their business. Even the most successful executives find themselves asked to learn new skills and handle unforeseen challenges. Consequently, for an organization to sustain success demands constant self-evaluation.

<u>Change requires reflection</u>

As executives, there is a continuous need to reflect, learn and be more effective. Leaders are challenged to go beyond the methods that have been the foundation of yesterday's success. The expectation of high performance from executives in shorter time frames has increased both the stress of the job, as well as accountability regarding results. Yet, few individuals invest the time to fully examine what has contributed to their successes or their struggles.

<u>Leaders receive less feedback as they move up the organization</u>

Our leaders are expected to be the clearest models of change, the ones who demonstrate the greatest ability to grow to meet the challenges. Ironically, most executives acknowledge that the higher they are promoted in the organizational structure, the less they receive useful feedback. It is difficult for a subordinate to give what might be perceived as critical input to a boss, contributing to the “lonely at the top” experience. Daniel Goleman calls this phenomenon the “CEO disease.” Combined with the pressure for rapid success, it becomes increasingly difficult to openly share any areas of personal or professional uncertainty with one's boss or with one's direct reports. Yet the need for candid, reflective and decisive discussion of context, methods and circumstances has never been more evident. Effective leaders consistently invest in examining how both personal and professional patterns and styles impact work and results.

<u>Executive coaching is emerging to fill the gap</u>

In response to the demand for leaders to embrace continuous learning and thoughtful, rigorous self-examination, the field of Executive Coaching has emerged and grown quickly. What is striking about this development is the reliance on "outside" organizational coaches - consultants who provide an independent, non-employee perspective. They are not the direct boss or second-level manager of the executive. Rather, they are hired consultants with training in fields of organizational behavior rather than the direct industry they are serving. These professionals are usually organizational and clinical psychologists or senior, battle-tested executives who are attuned to the demands and vagaries of organizational life.

The need for outside executive coaching is most often due to three factors regarding the bosses of the executives:

(a) lack of time for the boss to give

(b) lack of inclination to spend time coaching
(c) lack of skills or training in coaching

In the past decade, an increased emphasis on executive coaching has explored the interaction and relationship of professional productivity and personal behavior. Coaches have focused on helping executives in high performance organizations meet challenging performance standards while maintaining or increasing their personal effectiveness. These coaches typically combine a mix of inquiry, teaching, consultation, problem solving, counseling and feedback. The style of the coach often determines the mix of skills provided. Many coaching models use inquiry, listening or facilitating the thinking process of the executive rather than providing a new answer. What is consistent is that all of the models suggest increased mastery of oneself as leverage to increase results at work.

Organizations are supporting coaching because they believe it provides their executives an additional competitive edge in achieving their business goals. A second rationale is that it may save an executive from burnout, sub-optimal performance issues or career switches outside the company. In other words, it may prevent a career derailment. Finally, companies are hoping that coaches provide support and guidance in changing ineffective behaviors, whether they be decision-making styles, meeting management, conflict resolution or plate management.

There is general agreement among executive coaches that the work is focused on business effectiveness. There is also agreement that such discussions cannot be divorced from the issue of personal style, personal patterns and overall life development. However, the primary emphasis consistently returns to the business issues and the executive's decisions, processes and management of them. Work that becomes focused consistently on personal aspects of the executive's life unrelated to their impact on the workplace should be considered for personal counseling or therapy.

While it is clear that the agenda is determined by the needs of the client, the typical discussion may draw upon any or all of the following key areas:

(a) <u>situational analysis</u> - including exploration of vision, personal stylistic strengths, weaknesses, blind spots and flat sides, opportunities, obstacles for the executive/ team/business/product. In Peter Senge's systems thinking models of creative tension, this would be the work required to define and be clear about "current reality."

(b) enhancing creativity - including new ideas (Roger Von Oech's "whacks on the side of the head"), learning styles, team synergies, patterns of thinking and acting, openness to new conceptual models

(c) breakthrough processes - exploring new learning, pushing limits, examining new horizons, reviewing potential actions, exploring positive changes

(d) support - including identification of resources, being a confidential ally for sharing, exploring, creating the right atmosphere within a team

(e) action implementation - examining strategy, sabotages, accountability, action plans and follow up mechanisms.

Trust is the key

All these discussion areas are in the context of the defined organizational goals and vision. Yet, for a coaching relationship to work, it must be grounded in a deep sense of partnership and personal trust between the executive and the coach. Trust emerges from the belief and experience that the coach is both authentically committed to the client's success as a leader and has the capability, experience and perspective to help him or her achieve that success. Trust supports genuineness and candor about both personal and professional questions that must be explored.

There is no single issue that can destroy the coaching relationship more than the inability to establish trust or the loss of trust after it had been initially established. The trust issue can take many forms - concerns over competency, issues about intention, doubts about confidentiality or ethics, problems with reliability, personal agendas - but whatever form it takes, it must be resolved or else the working relationship will likely bear little fruit. Trust is a precondition to the success of the relationship.

Issues in Managing Executive Coaching Services

The "new" field of coaching has yet to fully understand its parameters, its problems, its dilemmas, its traps and its potential. Much remains to be learned about both proper framework and proper implementation. It is not a field that has any state governmental regulation or agreed-upon professional standards. As a result, it is incumbent on those organizations utilizing executive coaches to have a working roadmap for managing this area. If an organization neglects to articulate the expectations and agreements regarding the coaching relationship, problems are likely to emerge to trouble the organizational leadership.

Thorny issues may arise, and companies solve those issues differently. What may work in one company due to structure, size, philosophy and policy may not work in another. Following are some of the issues and dilemmas that we have noticed. These are meant to stimulate the thinking process of the reader. Since there is not a singular benchmark or agreed-upon best demonstrated practice, we are likely to discover a host of acceptable designs. However, when an organization neglects to articulate the expectations and agreements regarding the coaching relationship, downstream problems are certain to emerge, risking the effectiveness of the process, and its reputation in the organization. Ultimately, the whole area will gain either a generally positive or generally negative reputation inside a company, and will then be easier or more difficult to sustain.

Hiring the Executive Coach

The need for and potential value of executive coaching may be strongly felt by a hard-pressed executive. The executive wants to act quickly, often as a result of pressure from a boss or peers about increasing effectiveness as a leader. Typically, an executive coach is hired on the basis of someone else's recommendation, e.g. - a friend, a boss, a peer or an HR professional. There may or may not be an initial "get to know you" meeting before deciding on a coach, but most often the decision-making process is informal and based on a combination of reputation plus initial interpersonal chemistry.

Screening for Capability

If an organization were hiring an individual as a company employee, there would be extensive background checks and reference work. In the hiring of an executive coach, who would be responsible for such screening? Does the person or team have the right to "blackball" a candidate who is still desired by the executive? Are there any minimum qualifications or organizational screenings that must occur for someone to be considered for executive coaching? If most "buy" decisions occur as a result of interpersonal chemistry, is there any review process on the decision? Who determines the competence of the coach and with what criteria?

Contracting

What is the standard for contracting with coaches? While virtually all coaches ask their clients what they want to accomplish with the coaching relationship, rarely do they agree on measurable results. Is the results focus on client satisfaction, knowledge and skills acquisition, behavior change, business results or some other variable? The range of agreement varies from a verbal understanding to a standard or specialized contract. Clarity and accountability are often missing from executive coaching contracts, which are typically not written down. What is written tends to focus on economic issues, such as the number of sessions at a certain rate. If there is an actual written agreement, it is more likely to address actions and processes than measurable results. What the company may be able to measure are monthly invoices arriving and being paid, but not necessarily demonstrable improvement in the executive's performance.

Focus and Results

Have we clearly defined the main focus of the work as addressing the organizational and leadership effectiveness of the executive? Can we be sure where the boundary exists between personal effectiveness and professional leadership skills? It is our belief that doing personal therapy in a business context is not executive coaching, nor is it appropriate. The question remains, how much time and emphasis should be allowed for working on personal development issues as opposed to strictly business issues? How close to the edge of therapy can executive coaching get without moving into that arena? Furthermore, what tasks are appropriate to expect a coach to do for an executive client? Who monitors the appropriateness of such requests?

Boundaries on the Coach's Activities

How widely may the coach work within the organization? When coaching a single executive, a coach may interview staff, colleagues, bosses and even customers to gain an understanding of the situation. Should a coach agree to also be the coach for the direct reports of an executive he or she is currently coaching?

Reporting Relationships

For whom does the coach really work - the executive client, the client's boss or the head of HR? Who does the coach report to, if anyone? What happens if the CEO wants to know from the coach how the executive is doing? These questions arise as a result of someone other than the executive who is being coached wanting information from the coaching sessions or process. This is usually triggered if behavioral or organizational performance problems of the person being coached are not resolving quickly enough for the boss or CEO. Supervisors want to know: the rate of progress, is the person salvageable, is the coaching addressing the issue that is of most concern to the boss or CEO? The CEO might naturally say, if "the company" is paying the bill, doesn't "the company" have the right to know what's going on? Is it the province of the HR VP or the role of the CEO/COO to manage results in this arena? Or should it be solely in the hands of the person being coached?

Confidentiality

Reporting relationships often trigger important questions regarding confidentiality. While professional confidentiality is widely acknowledged and recognized in psychological, legal and medical professions, exactly what are its correct boundaries in this context? What is the professional standard in a field that is a hybrid of other disciplines? How does the coach deal with issues regarding violations of corporate policy or culture? What is the correct stance with regard to actions if the coach becomes aware that an executive has violated a law?

Costs and Time Investment

Executive Coaches don't come cheap. Rates typically run from $200-$400/hour or higher. Over a year that can add up to a significant investment in both time and money. In many cases, the coach is hired on a retainer for a period of time or a specific amount of money. How many other business expenditures would be made so casually and with so few specifically agreed-upon outcomes?

How long should the contract reasonably continue? What is the minimum time to invest so that it is a process rather than an event? How often should coaching occur? Should it be regular or on an "as needed" basis?

It is easy to imagine many additional questions to trouble the concerned reader. Much is going to be learned from the collective experience of organizations that employ coaches to support executive development. But, at a minimum, issues listed above must be given attention or the executive coaching process is likely to fail as illustrated in the case at the beginning of this article. Let's revisit the case to examine where it went wrong and what alternate choices might have yielded success.

Chuck's case

The example of Chuck and his coach demonstrates errors in judgment on the part of both the executive and the coach. In different and ultimately disastrous ways, each failed to create proper definitions and boundaries around the coach's role, thereby alienating key stakeholders to Chuck's ultimate success. Specific mistakes include:

Doing the executive's work

When Chuck asked his coach to track the progress of his staff initiatives, he was abdicating the key supervisory responsibility of monitoring. Chuck also lost coaching opportunities afforded by those monitoring sessions, and left his staff feeling abandoned to a stand-in. The coach, by accepting the assignment, blurred his role as an external, objective outsider, and essentially became "one of the team," taking on a delegated responsibility that inevitably created resentment on the part of the staff.

Suggestion: If Chuck needed to have someone sit in for him in this capacity while he was traveling, it would have been more appropriate to assign the responsibility to one of his staff.

Initiating meetings without the client's knowledge

By setting up a meeting with the COO while Chuck was traveling, the coach may have thought he was being efficient as well as diagnostic. The result was he not only missed learning about the COO's "hot buttons," which he might have known had he consulted with Chuck beforehand, but he also eroded his client's trust in him. Chuck was now uneasy about what his coach would do or say next without his knowledge.

Suggestion: The client executive should initiate entry for the coach with the boss, peers and staff, clearly describing the coaching context and how any meetings with the coach will support the executive's development. The coach should stick to that contract, and generally use such meetings for diagnostic purposes, not intervention.

Unclear results for the money invested

There are several problems here. First, Chuck ran up costs unnecessarily by having his coach perform the weekly monitoring function with his staff, as well as by inviting the coach to sit in on offsite meetings at expensive resorts. Second, whatever issues Chuck was working on with his coach were apparently neither agreed upon nor even shared with Chuck's boss. The COO’s expectations, in turn, went unasked and unfulfilled. Finally, no progress reports were being provided to Chuck’s boss with regard to coaching accomplishments; consequently, he had no way of knowing if the company's money was being well spent. All Chuck’s boss saw were invoices being paid. He perceived no substantive change in performance.

Suggestions: The coach, client executive, and the client’s manager should meet together before beginning any coaching process and agree to what areas will be worked and what results are targeted. The executive should report progress regularly to his or her manager, and not assume that performance will change or that results will be obvious to others. Additionally, executives must realize that in these times of resource and financial restrictions, an executive coach, while likely a good investment, may be perceived by others to be a costly one. Executives should find another option to paying an hourly fee plus expenses for an expensive offsite where the coach is simply observing.

Let's look at another coaching situation, with different problems.

Warren was a consultant and executive coach who had held significant corporate positions in Human Resources at a variety of companies before starting his consulting practice. He developed a contract to coach a senior executive, Laura, who was extremely bright and well meaning, but quite introverted and uncomfortable leading people. Warren met with Laura weekly, gave her management books to read, listened to her problems and dilemmas, and provided behavioral assignments for her to complete each week between their meetings.

Laura was so delighted with her work with Warren that she began recommending him as a coach to other executives in the organization. In addition, she mandated that her staff all begin using Warren as a coach. Shortly, Warren was coaching at least a dozen people in that organization, including first-level managers and an occasional individual contributor.

While a number of Laura's staff seemed accepting of the coaching sessions, at least one of them was uncomfortable having as a coach the same person who coached his boss. He found himself speaking very carefully, afraid his words would come back to haunt him. Indeed, there were a number of instances when information that had been discussed with Warren reached either the most senior executive in the organization (Laura's boss), or simply became known within the group. Concerns about Warren's being too enmeshed in the organization, knowing too much about too many people, and letting information slip out began to crop up. Additionally, Warren actively solicited business from a variety of people in the company. He asked his coaching clients as well as the OD Director to recommend him to other company employees, tried to convince the EEO manager that he could do a project in that area, and came up with a proposal to design a training program for the Training Department.

Here is a situation where what started out as a relatively simple and seemingly successful coaching relationship evolved into a mess for the coach, the executive, and the organization. The concerns are multiple.

Coaching too many people in the same organization

This created discomfort for the executive's direct reports, none of whom had selected Warren as their coach, and therefore didn't necessarily trust him to keep their confidences. This is not to say that coaching more than one person in a management chain can't work, but it should not be mandated, as it was here due to Laura's enthusiasm for her coach.

Suggestions: Let other executives in the organization see the results the coach and client are getting. Encourage them to interview at least two potential coaches and quiz each candidate about confidentiality and conflict of interest concerns. Ensure that the most senior executive being coached candidly describes the confidentiality agreement he or she has with the coach, so others will be sure that their boss won't ask the coach for information they have revealed in confidence.

Questionable confidentiality

It is unclear whether Warren actually broke clients' confidences. He was omnipresent within the organization, and he talked to Laura's boss often. When information he might have revealed got out into the system, he was easier to blame than the employee rumor mill.

Suggestions: Coaches must be excruciatingly careful regarding what they say and to whom. The most senior executive with whom they interact must be engaged in a discussion with the coach about boundaries. Both the coach and executive must be clear and in agreement about what the coach will and will not discuss. If no one in the organization does it, the coach early on must clarify to him or herself who the client really is, what kind of information is demanded by the CEO, the HR department, and so forth. The coach must also inform his or her coaching client the extent to which the parties paying the bill have requested information on a one-time or regular basis. Finally, he or she must decide if that is acceptable within the context of his or her own professional ethics.

Soliciting additional business

Although Warren was an experienced HR professional, his inquiring about potential work in training, EEO, or some other unit of the organization, created an impression within the company that he was "milking" his relationships, even though he may have been well qualified to provide value-added services in the areas identified. Even asking clients to recommend him as a coach to other executives in the company made some of his current clients uncomfortable, and was viewed as inappropriate.

Suggestions: Executive coaching is both extremely personal and grounded in trust. Therefore, it requires more sensitivity to misinterpretation than other forms of consulting. Unsolicited referrals carry more weight, and it is always better to be invited in than to spend time and risk eroding customer goodwill through cross selling.

The Dilemma of a New Arena

Executive Coaching is increasingly widespread and is a new area for both HR leaders and CEO's to manage. There are few articulated guidelines to observe. A recent check across San Francisco Bay area companies in a variety of industries reveals that standards, expectations, and policies run from sketchy to informal to non-existent. There is even confusion about just what is being provided as coaching for executives. People can claim to be coaches with no credentials and little experience that would be relevant to their ability to provide significant assistance to a business executive. Executive Coaching, as we have discussed it in this article, requires credentials, significant experience in the business arena and hard-won wisdom.

When something goes wrong in the Executive Coaching process, there are few experts to turn to for clear guidance. Almost all of the articles extolling the virtues of Executive Coaching have ignored the complex administrative, systems or results issues associated with this new field. Our efforts to create policy and guidelines come from an appreciation of the value that coaches offer to companies as one part of the executive development process.

Conclusions

While our examples may not answer every question, the sample corporate policy (exhibit 1) and guidelines for executives on how to use a coach (exhibit 2) may help companies avoid the thorniest and most frustrating problems. It ensures that the time and money spent on executive coaching yield results that justify the expense.

While it is evident from the questions posed and the cases described that executive coaching is an area rife with potential confusion and even disaster, we want to affirm that with planning and discipline, it can yield enormous value for the executives and companies involved. What is needed is a combination of clear policy, matching philosophies, explicit expectations, unambiguous contracting, and ongoing candid communication between all stakeholders in the process. No doubt, as the discipline continues to emerge, clarity about the most effective maps and models for coaching as well as the most powerful tools, processes and methodologies will help create standards that will separate the skilled practitioners from the pretenders.

The benefits to an organization of having good executive coaches can be enormous: an infusion of expertise into the system where there had been a void, improved executive productivity which will trigger improved organizational performance, increased job satisfaction and decreased turnover among top talent and those around them. These are significant outcomes of effective executive coaching that can be achieved if thought and care is given to initiating and managing the relationship toward accountability and measurable business results.

EXHIBIT #1

SAMPLE POLICY STATEMENT: THE USE OF EXECUTIVE COACHES

X Co. supports the professional development of all its employees and recognizes that in addition to growth assignments, pursuit of relevant educational degrees, and attending training programs, one-on-one coaching by an external professional is a legitimate and valuable development option, particularly for managers and executives. Research indicates that as a manager's level rises within an organization, the likelihood of receiving honest feedback correspondingly diminishes. For this reason, the Company supports the use of executive coaches in a way that helps both the employee's and company's performance and effectiveness.

An executive coach may be retained for an employee for a limited though renewable amount of time, to enable that employee to work on improving his/her performance or effectiveness in specified areas of the job. A coach may not be retained indefinitely or take on portions of the client's own responsibilities.

Policy

The services of an executive coach may be retained for a specific employee (usually a director or above) for up to six months at a time, subject to approval by the appropriate Executive Staff member (or CEO/COO if the client in on the executive team), the VP of HR and the Director of Human Resources Development. As part of the contracting process, the coach will sign a non-disclosure agreement with the Company. If, during the coaching assignment, the coach learns any financial or product information, he/she may be considered an insider by the SEC, for which the company takes no responsibility.

Coaches will have either a graduate degree in industrial, organizational or clinical psychology, a Masters Degree in Business Administration, or equivalent experience, and will provide a resume and a list of areas of specialization, as well as references from previous coaching clients/client managers.

Contract renewal will be semi-annual, subject to the approval of the Director of Human Resource Development and/or the HR VP.

Process

Before beginning a coaching assignment, the coach will reach agreement with the client and the client's manager as to objectives and results expected from the coaching experience. These expectations may be reviewed and modified as appropriate throughout the duration of the coaching contract. The coached executive will provide semi-annual progress reports, in writing, to his/her manager. The executive coach will be available to consult with the appropriate HR Generalist and HRD Director to discuss organizational needs and issues that come to his/her attention, without impacting the confidentiality implicit in coaching relationships.

Additionally, should an executive coach become aware of any company policy violations (e.g., sexual harassment, etc.), he or she must immediately inform the HR Generalist for further action. The coach must not under any circumstances deal with policy violations independent of Company HR personnel.

EXHIBIT #2

Coaching Guidelines for Executives

What to expect

1. How to know if you need one

Almost every executive can benefit from executive coaching. Since the circumstances of business are constantly changing, there is an increasing need to examine how to perform better. In a competitive atmosphere, continuous learning and personal development are critical to effective performance with the ongoing challenges of being an executive. Executives may see coaching as either part of that ongoing responsibility to grow as a leader or as a specific time-based support to a particular skill, style or performance development issue.

The executive must recognize that a coach is not a panacea or an all-knowing answer to current questions. A coach represents a means to insure that the leader is observing and changing ineffective work patterns, thinking habits or blind spots. Coaching should support consistent self examination and help generate strategic action options to increase leadership effectiveness.

2. Credentials

Coaches should have either graduate degrees in industrial, organizational or clinical psychology, an MBA or equivalent experience. There are also new, independent, free-standing coaching certification programs that are providing new non-academic credentialing. Coaches should provide a list of references and a resume to the company. It is the executive's responsibility to check references rigorously.

The coach may have a variety of content areas that they consider expertise. It is valuable to have a coach that has a reasonable degree of generalist skill. Specific detailed consultation from content specialists (e.g.- marketing, manufacturing, etc.) is a natural complement to the generalist coach who should be working as an overall partner to your work success.

3. Contract

The coach and the executive should agree upon a focus, a set of objectives and a timetable during which they will achieve their work. The contract is typically for a window of time that would be anywhere from 3-12 months and is renewable if both parties desire to continue, based upon need, results and mutual satisfaction regarding the working relationship. As part of the contract, the coach signs a non-disclosure agreement.

4. Frequency

Coaches may see an executive in a variety of formats based upon the urgency of the work and the convenience of the parties. Sessions can be scheduled as often as weekly or as infrequently as every 2 months. Typically, coaches will see the executive every 3-4 weeks. The schedule remains flexible to meet the needs of the executive.

5. Length of sessions

Sessions may extend from 1-4 hours based upon the agreement of the parties involved, with sessions typically running 1-2 hours

6. Phone briefings

It is common to do telephone contacts to check on progress or to review new events that may be impacting a given question. Such contacts may be scheduled or spontaneous depending on preference and circumstance of the executive. Some coaches alternate between in-person visits and telephone visits. Some coaches may work extensively by phone with relatively few face–to-face meetings after the initial get-together.

7. Homework

The coach may suggest work to the executive to insure practice with the newly developed skills or perspectives. This work should be completed between coaching sessions to discover if the new strategies are effective. Sometimes the executive may need to gather data on real-time behavior, read or observe the behavior of him or herself or others.

8.<u>Follow up tracking</u>

Both the coach and the executive should be responsible to insure tracking of issues that they have identified as critical to their success. Mutual accountability increases results.

9. <u>Expected financial investment</u>

Coaches can range in price between $100-400/hour dependent on the background, experience and longevity of the coaching relationship.

10. <u>Billings</u>

Coaches should be billing on a monthly basis and purchase orders should be created prior to the billing cycle based upon the mutually agreed-upon contract.

11. <u>Cancellations</u>

Both parties should be expected to provide 72-hour notice to give the other a chance to reschedule. It is expected that client cancellations less than 24 hours before the session are considered billable for the coach. Mutual consideration is a key operating principle when there is a potential for cancellation.

12. <u>Session notes</u>

It is expected that the coach and the executive keep written notes on the work that they do together. The notes may be shared between the two of them but are considered confidential material and are the property of the executive and the coach.

<u>Managing the Process Effectively</u>

1. <u>Orientation to the business and to the Coach's role in the company</u>

It is expected that the executive provide the coach with a clear, comprehensive and current orientation to the nature and status of the business enterprise to insure the proper perspective and context. The orientation should give the coach an understanding of the overall enterprise plus the specific business unit. It is not expected that proprietary information, business secrets or other confidential information be disclosed except on an as-needed basis to help the coach understand a current situation. Periodic updates of this orientation may be necessary as the business evolves. As part of the business orientation, HR OD will provide a session to orient the new coach to the organizations expectations for Executive Coaches.

2. <u>Focus (balance of professional and personal)</u>

The best executives recognize the fundamental connection between their effectiveness as a person and their effectiveness as a leader. They recognize their dual responsibility to grow as a person and as a leader. The focus of coaching sessions might swing back and forth between the two arenas as a natural expression of these two areas of growth. However, it is not appropriate to utilize executive coaching as a substitute for personal therapy. The primary focus of coaching should be the challenges of the work arena while staying cognizant of the essential interconnectedness of personal and professional skill sets.

There are many types of coaching and a good coach is capable of providing a variety of perspectives in helping to understand and address a given issue. Many arenas for discussion may deepen the dialogue between executive and coach. Examples include: project review, systems review, personal style, team effectiveness, and performance issues.

3. <u>Agenda identification</u>

The agenda should be mutually developed. There may be shifts back and forth as each tracks selective issues, but both voices should be heard and the dialogue should be based on joint consideration of priorities. When there is disagreement about the agenda, the executive should have the final say on what takes priority for discussion. The coach may insist on an issue being surfaced when he or she feels it represents a "blind spot" for the executive that would otherwise be avoided.

4. <u>Preparation</u>

The agenda will naturally combine a series of ongoing and current issues. At times, a single issue may dominate the discussion landscape for an extended period if it is critical to work success. If an issue gets stuck, it may be time to move the discussion to other significant issues or consider other avenues by which the executive may address the issue.

It is expected that the executive come prepared to the coaching session. The executive should have asked him or herself what issues deserve discussion and what has been driving the situation. The coach should have reviewed previous issues and considered what natural extensions of the discussion are required as well as what issues might be emerging from the prior efforts.

5. Evaluation of work

It is recommended that regularly scheduled periodic oral evaluations of the work be conducted between the coach and the executive. This naturally supplements the session evaluation and allows a longer term perspective to emerge. Course corrections and new agreements on focus, frequency or style can be implemented.

6. Confidentiality

Executives can expect to talk to their coach about subjects that are difficult, uncomfortable and perhaps even embarrassing under certain circumstances. Specifics of the discussion are considered confidential and that understanding should be a defined and reviewed part of the partnership contract.

There may be areas of performance or effectiveness that will have been agreed to between the coach, the client and the client's manager as a precursor to the coaching relationship work. The executive may agree to report regularly to his or her manager on progress. It is expected, consistent with ethical standards in professional fields, that a coach is required to report any violation of corporate policy or law. In such cases, professional performance standards transcend the private confidential nature of the coaching relationship.

Maintaining appropriate boundaries

1. What coaches can't or shouldn't do

a. Management activities

The coach may not take on portions of the client's own accountabilities, i.e., managing people or relationships, leading project teams, intervening on the client's behalf with staff, peers or senior managers.

b. Employee Relations

The coach does not provide employee relations services. In the event an Employee Relations issue arises, the coach must contact the appropriate Human Resources person who will handle the issue.

c. Staff meetings

Except for occasional "shadowing" to get an understanding of how the client interacts with his/her staff, or to understand group dynamics the client is not certain how to explain or manage, the coach should not generally attend staff meetings. This will avoid any potential confusion about whether the coach is "on the staff" or not. The answer is clearly "not."

d. Team problems

When a coach has been engaged to work with an executive, expanding the scope may cause confusion. While he or she may interview the executive’s team to get input for working with the coaching client and may share their impressions of the members of the team, you can't assume that someone who is skilled in coaching is equally capable of working the dynamics inherent in group work. In addition, you may inadvertently raise suspicions of bias, since it's "your" coach. For team problems, in general, go to your HR staff, who will work with you to identify and resolve the problems, or will bring in other skilled resources to do the same.

e. Facilitation for Manager's team or staff

At times it may be appropriate to use the coach to assist in observing or leading a discussion with an executive’s team or staff. This should not be an ongoing activity but may be utilized periodically for the purpose of supporting a given coaching objective, understanding executive performance with staff, or getting to know staff members in the work context.