

Corporate coaching goes mainstream

How to leverage high-potential employees and nix the cost of executive failure **Interviewed by Paul Harvey**

Ten years ago if an employer asked you to work with a business coach, you might have taken it as a hint to update your resume. Now, coaching is perceived both as a valuable perk offered to high-potential individuals, and a strategy for companies to avoid the enormous costs related to executive failure in the first year.

But what actually occurs between a coach and executive to propel an already successful individual even further toward his or her goals and objectives?

“It’s like a brain massage that produces permanent shifts in attitudes, belief systems and how people operate,” says Madeleine Homan, founder of Coaching Services at The Ken Blanchard Companies in Escondido. “It translates into observable differences in what executives do and say — and that’s what organizations are looking for.”

Smart Business recently spoke to Homan about how a clear mission will produce the most successful coaching results.

Why are leaders and organizations working with coaches?

It’s rare that an individual wakes up one day and says, ‘Wow, I really could use a coach.’ The main reason for bringing in a coach is that an organization is seeking extra support for its leaders. With the trend toward the abolishment of middle management, your new managers may only have time to do the bare minimum. They may not know anything about leadership and haven’t had time to develop good management practices for themselves. That’s where coaching comes in.

Coaches have all of the content background about best leadership and management practices, phenomenal communication models, skills around how to deal with power and influence models, and they’ve read all the books that you don’t have time to read. A coach can share the one concept in a book that’s going to be useful to you right this minute. Organizations also are utilizing onboarding coaching for people starting new jobs or making the transition from individual contributor to manager or from manager to senior leader.



Madeleine Homan
Founder, Coaching Services
The Ken Blanchard Companies

What mindset can help maximize coaching?

Coaches understand organizations and understand people’s temperaments, personalities and types, and they don’t judge. Many executives go into coaching thinking their organization is giving them coaching because something is wrong. That’s not coaching. Occasionally, there is coaching to close a gap in a skill set, but mostly, it’s for development, because leaders today need to go from A to B so much faster than they have in the past.

People are realizing that coaching is a perk for those who are adding value to the organization. That is changing the mindset of people going into coaching. Participants should be oriented to coaching thoroughly so they truly understand what it is, what they can expect to get out of it, and what’s expected of them. It’s like anything else — you’re going to get out of it what you put in.

Sometimes people come in and try to ‘yes’ the coach. They try to fake it and make their coach feel like they’re actually working. Good coaches know how to recognize that and call it out. Coaches also challenge people when they’re willing participants, but are not stepping up or taking the risks.

What are turning points in a coaching program?

There is a positive turning point when the organization’s sponsors first see that the coaching is paying off. But the first individual turning point is not always a good one. When people start the coaching, they establish some useful areas to focus on with their coach, and they get into action. They get the low-hanging fruit and make some easy changes. But sometime around the third or fourth session, they’ll get up against it with actually challenging themselves to do something that’s hard. They become a disillusioned learner and hit the wall. The coaches know this happens, and they’re very adept at helping them work through to the next level of having a win.

How is a coaching relationship concluded?

It’s a mark of a novice or unethical coach to try to keep himself in the game. Both you and your coach have to aim for a good ending point. If you complete the program and say, ‘Wow! I want to keep working with my coach to accomplish a whole new set of objectives,’ that’s fine. But when executives hang out with their coach without clear objectives, action items and milestones, organizations start to feel like they’re wasting money — and they are. Unless the mission is clear, nobody will know what has been accomplished.

Can coaching become a permanent activity?

The amazing part of coaching is that when you’re facing big transitions — a job change, a move to a different company, a huge promotion, or you’ve left the workforce to become a full-time mom — it’s great to be able to go back to your coach. You can cut right to the chase because there’s all that history, and the coach understands your values and who you are.

MADELEINE HOMAN is founder, Coaching Services, at The Ken Blanchard Companies, a global leader in workplace learning, productivity, performance and leadership effectiveness. She can be reached through The Ken Blanchard Companies Web site at www.kenblanchard.com/homan.

Insights Leadership is brought to you by The Ken Blanchard Companies