



Nowhere But **UP**

Who is the best candidate for executive coaching at your business?

by **Stephen Xavier**

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EXECUTIVE COACHING CANDIDATES are easy to identify because they're typically among a company's best talent. And, although they fall into distinctive categories, one common thread links both groups into being coach-eligible, and that is their ability to improve.

By identifying which areas of improvement must be addressed, it's likely these candidates can go from great to even greater in terms of their contributions to the organization.

Voted Most Likely

Executive coaching has earned its place as an effective method of personnel development in the corporate world, but how does management know who represents the most likely candidates? Sure, a few employees could stand to have their rough edges ironed out, but do these individuals require executive coaching?

Not always. Generally speaking, executive coaching is about learning. It all begins with discovering where an executive stands now, then measuring the distance between that and the future direction desired, and laying out a plan to get there.

Two Types

Using this scenario, it might be easier to break coaching candidates into two distinct categories:

■ **High potential/rising stars** This group represents 75 to 80 percent of all coaching candidates or at least it should. Generally, it includes employees who are younger or less seasoned and less experienced, yet are perceived as rising stars or possessing obvious, as-yet untapped talent. Those who work around them know they're capable of bigger and better achievements in their careers.

Others in this category who would benefit from

coaching are the more senior ranking of the high-performance individuals who, much to their own amazement, may lack "seasoning" in some critical areas of management.

These might be employees who work just below vice presidential level, for instance, who need that extra boost to reach VP. Or VP's who seek senior VP level, yet have somehow become paralyzed in their present position by perhaps just being there too long.

■ **Problem candidates** The other 20 percent or so of the coaching candidate pile is filled with remarkably accomplished individuals who also tend to be their own worst enemies. Sales departments are often home to this type of candidate.

Picture a high-profile, high-profit drug company with 10 salespeople. Leading the way is the star performer, bringing in \$30 to \$40 million of revenue annually.

Unfortunately, this person is also the subject of numerous conflicts in the office because of consistent lack of willingness to "play by the rules". This becomes very easy to overlook, however, when the next-closest salesperson only generates between \$12 and \$15 million annually.

Nevertheless, co-workers can become angry, and some may even refuse to work with this "star employee". In this situation, coaching works to make the star performer more tolerant of the rules, more cognizant of why they exist and perhaps more sensitive to how his or her attitude and behavior impact others in the office.

Emotional Intelligence

Although there's no way to ascertain up front the extent of an employee's emotional intelligence, it can and should be measured through robust assessment to determine an employee's viability as a coaching candidate.

Regardless of the reason for coaching, it's im-

portant to note the predominant role played by emotional intelligence in the whole process.

Too often, executives live a feedback-starved existence. Across the board, individuals truly do need improvements in given areas, but they also need their emotional intelligence bolstered.

Consider John, a highly skilled engineer in a large manufacturing firm who has been consistently successful, focused and disciplined. His overriding problem is that he is introverted, which helps explain his being too risk-averse – a common complaint heard about him. As a result, his career has reached a plateau.

Obviously, this would have been more acceptable if John were closer to retirement age, but a person who is in his 30s, 40s, or 50s still has the time to take advantage of coaching and prove him- or herself in another position, or improve upon a current role.

The focus might be on broadening John's exposure in the organization by teaching him social skills and/or more effective networking skills. If he can rise above his tendency to withdraw, John can continue to grow within the company by moving beyond his current position.

On the flip side, high producers who have had no problem reaching great success might benefit from coaching that encourages them to scale back and be less abrasive and demanding. Again, it's an issue of emotional intelligence because coaching would work to teach them higher self-awareness and social sensitivity.

For the Right Reasons

Once a coaching candidate is identified, that individual has a good chance of benefiting providing the coaching is being done for the right reasons. Most of these reasons are driven by the attitude of the coachee's boss at the time of the engagement.

In many cases, the person who hires the coach does so because of his or her inability to manage well. Actually, this is fine as long as the boss stays involved. But, if coaching ends up being targeted exclusively at the coachee, the engagement begins and ends right there.

It's simply an ineffective model without the boss working closely each step of the way.

Organizations that truly support the notion of executive coaching see the value in it as well as promote its value. In other words, they will become engaged in the process, too. Doing so is encouraging to others because nothing is as effective as when management models the same behavior it expects its employees to take on.

In the end, if the right candidate is selected for the right reason, and with the right level of management support, a successful outcome is more likely—with everyone involved reaping the benefits.

Who Won't Benefit

Even when a candidate could benefit from the coaching experience, there will always be those in the organization who will not reap the rewards. The majority, if not all of them, falls into certain groups.

Non-Believers

Somewhere along the way, something convinced these employees that coaching simply isn't necessary for improvement or that they are simply above the process.

Unaware and Unprepared

This group represents employees who aren't brought into the preliminary planning process. The coaching engagement is more or less sprung on them with complete surprise.

Low Leverage

Coaches who walk into an engagement without some sort of leverage with the coachee are doomed for failure. Having some sort of bargaining tool (e.g., a promotion) offers a sense of purpose and reason, even if the coachee is told the engagement will do no more than offer a chance for promotion. Ideally, selecting the best coaching candidate requires supervisors who know employee potential well enough to stay engaged with the process. Stated differently, any supervisor who hires a coach to relieve management responsibilities had better think again.



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