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6 Ways An Executive Coach Can Make You More Successful

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Careers



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Over the past 30 years, executive coaches have gone from rare to common. Most people in corporations assume that being given the chance to work with a coach is a positive thing, and so we seldom find ourselves being asked to explain the benefits of executive coaching. People generally come to us already knowing that they want to engage a coach, and having a fairly clear idea of what they expect from the relationship. So when a potential client asked recently how he would benefit from working with an executive coach, it was a good opportunity for me to reflect on the positive outcomes of coaching. And it made me realize that other people might

also have this question but be hesitant to ask, since coaching has become such an accepted — even expected — practice at many companies.

So here are the key positives we've observed over almost three decades of offering executive coaching services and seeing what happens when clients take full advantage of the opportunity. If you, as the client, go into a coaching engagement with an open mind and a real willingness to grow, you can reasonably expect to reap these benefits:

1. See yourself more clearly. This sounds simple, but is actually very important. [Research](#) has shown that most of us don't see ourselves very clearly and that it matters: accurate self-awareness in leaders is highly correlated with organizational effectiveness and profitability, and employees prefer to follow leaders who see themselves clearly (and are willing to share their perceptions). When you engage with a good coach, he or she will generally gather input about how others see you at the beginning of the engagement, and share it with you. (The best coaches will also pattern the feedback into key themes, to further clarify others' perceptions of your key strengths and growth areas.) Throughout the coaching engagement, your coach will also share his or her perceptions of you, based on observation of you and your interactions with others. Most important, if your coach is effective, he or she will help you build skills to see yourself more clearly: to question your assumptions about yourself, get curious about where you're strong and where you need to grow, and learn to see yourself with "[fair witness](#)" eyes.

2. See others more clearly. Over the years, we've often seen leaders run into problems because of their inaccurate assessments of those around them. They may lose good employees because they don't recognize and support their capabilities, or keep poor performers too long because they think they're better than they are. They may stumble politically because they over- or underestimate someone's ability to have an impact on their career success. A good and insightful coach will often have more neutral and accurate perceptions of those around you than you will, and will share those perceptions with you (especially if he or she is doing other work in your organization). And — because skilled coaches work to make

their coaching clients independent — he or she will also help you apply the same mental skills you learned for seeing yourself more clearly so that you can become more accurate in your assessment of others.

3. Learn new ways to respond. Marshall Goldsmith, perhaps the best-known executive coach in the U.S., wrote a book called *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. It's a wonderful title because the idea is so true. We all have a set of capabilities and responses that may serve us well as mid-level employees but that won't help us as more senior leaders. For example, I coached a very smart and capable senior vice president in a media company a couple of years ago who was still mostly just putting her head down and getting her work done — she hadn't learned to bring her team together and ensure they were all working in sync toward the highest-priority goals. I was able to help her see that her success now depended not only on the quality of her own work but also on her ability to inspire and direct others. I worked with her to learn the necessary skills and shift her mindset — and she now has new, more useful tools in her "leadership toolkit."

4. Leverage your existing strengths. Having an effective and supportive coach can also help you see and leverage strengths that you already have but that you may be underestimating. Many years ago, I coached a CEO who had a real gift for envisioning products and services that would appeal to customers in the future. He somehow thought that wasn't a big deal (in fact, he said to me at one point, "Doesn't everyone do that?"). I helped him see the uniqueness and value of this capability, and to learn how to lean into it in order to use it more effectively for the benefit of his team and his organization.

5. Build more productive relationships. Leaders can dramatically limit their effectiveness by only being willing or able to build strong relationships with certain kinds of people. And all too often, that means people like themselves — in background, race, gender, beliefs, or work style. A good coach can help you recognize that tendency in yourself and work against it, both by helping you see and question the limiting assumptions you make about people who aren't like you, and by offering

you tools to support you in understanding and creating strong and vital working relationships with a wider variety of people. (Here's one of our [favorite](#) models — we use it in pretty much every coaching engagement and also as a tool for building teams.)

6. Achieve what you want. This is the bottom line for an effective coaching engagement. A good coach can help you get clearer about your goals and dreams, and about what you're capable of doing in order to achieve them. He or she can also be a powerfully useful support system on your journey: someone who knows you very well and wants the best for you — but is a neutral third party. Unlike your family or your employees, your coach isn't dependent on you for his or her success. He or she can be honest with you about how you're doing, reminding you of what you've said you want to achieve and letting you know what you're doing that's supporting your intentions — or getting in your way. Finally, and most importantly, your coach can teach you new ways of thinking and operating, new skills that will allow you to better reach your goals and create the career you want.

I've seen hundreds of executives grow in these ways as a result of working with a skilled coach. But I have two caveats: Your coach has to be good, and you have to be coachable.

Because coaching has become so popular during the past couple of decades, there are a lot of people working as coaches who won't necessarily be able to support you in these ways. Here's some [help](#) in sorting the good from the not-so-good when it comes to coaches. And, perhaps even more important: there's you. If you're not willing to go through the often-daunting, frustrating and embarrassing process of acknowledging that you need to grow, and actually doing what it takes to grow, you won't benefit from having a coach. No matter how old you are or where you are in your career, if you want to get the most from having a coach, you have to be willing to be a novice in some areas. To support you in this willingness, you might be interested in reading [this](#) article or watching [this](#) brief video; both are about the art and practice of getting good at new things.

Like any new endeavor, working with a coach can be challenging and even a little scary. But if you're brave, committed and curious, you'll find your coaching relationship can be a powerful catalyst to becoming the person you most want to be.

Check out my [website](#).



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