



7 Ways to Take the Risk Out of Executive Coaching

By Trisha D. Scudder

Founder / Principal, Executive Coaching Group, Inc.

When Executive Coaching Group, Inc., was founded in 1987, 1:1 business coaching was just beginning to emerge and be recognized for increasing the performance of individuals and business teams.

As a pioneer in the industry for over 25 years, ECG has learned how to make executive coaching consistently effective and accountable, thereby taking the risk out of new engagements.

There are seven essential elements to a successful program, successful not just for the person being coached but also for his/her manager, HR liaison and organization. This is the method we've developed over years. We hope you find this overview useful.

The seven elements of an effective, accountable executive coaching program:

1.) Free choice. The executive or manager who will be coached [the Coachee] must have a say in whether to be coached, if the coaching is management-initiated, and a choice in the selection of the coach.

We recommend that the HR liaison select two or three qualified coaches from outside the organization. The Coachee then meets these pre-screened coaches and selects the one to work with – or declines to be coached. There are likely to be consequences if the Coachee declines coaching but telling the truth prevents the Coach and Coachee from embarking on a pointless venture -- and the organization from wasting time and money.

2.) Measures. During Month 1 of the program measurable written business goals with deadlines must be set and aligned on by the Coach, Coachee, Coachee's Manager and HR liaison. The Coach and Coachee can set additional personal goals, if they wish, but the program's emphasis needs to be on the business goals.

The goals must stretch beyond predictable, business-as-usual results while not being pipedreams. Achieving these results is the focus of the coaching program and the Coach must design each coaching session to move the Coachee closer to achieving the goals.

3.) Integrity. Clear, rigorous ground rules must be established by the Coach and adhered to by Coach and Coachee so the program operates upon a foundation of integrity, mutual respect and workability. Ground rules include strict policies and consequences for missed appointments and late starts, so both are rare.

Also included in the integrity of the program is confidentiality. The details of the coaching conversations between Coach and Coachee must be kept confidential so that trust and safety is established for the Coachee. The Coach must not discuss the particulars of the coaching conversations with anyone but the Coachee.

4.) A Transformational Approach. Success requires not merely informational coaching, but transformational coaching. There won't be breakthroughs in performance unless the Coachee is freed from limiting perceptions and assumptions – his or her blind spots. Only transformational coaching achieves that. For over 25 years the coaches of Executive Coaching Group have studied and applied transformational coaching.

5.) Focus on Action. The point of coaching is performance, enhanced results. And to accomplish this, the Coach must prompt, even insist on, action. This might seem obvious but many Coaches and Coachees get seduced by insights and fail to turn them into action.

The Coach encourages action by asking, for example, “How will you turn that insight into action?” and soliciting promises of specific actions that will be taken by a specific date. Creating an action plan to fulfill the program's business goals is another important element, with related progress points, monitors, statistics and reporting schedules.

6.) Accountability. The Coach and Coachee cannot operate in a vacuum, accountable only to themselves. Corporate stories of “coaching run amuck” abound. A few years ago Harvard Business Review entitled its article on this situation “The Wild West of Executive Coaching.”

ECG has found that aligning on goals in Month 1, having a mid-program debriefing between Coach, Manager and HR Liaison, and having a Completion Meeting with all parties, including the Coachee, is a workable and effective structure for accountability and course correction when needed.

The mid-program briefing, assuming a six-month coaching program which is ECG's standard format, allows the Coach to report if the Coachee is participating sufficiently and if the program is on track. The Manager and HR Liaison report any feedback they have received about the Coachee's [or Coach's] performance and if they have observed any shift in behavior or increases in performance just 2 - 3 months into the program.

Operating transparently, the Coach tells the Coachee prior to the debriefing what she/he is going to report to the Manager and HR Liaison.

During the final month of the program the Coach and Coachee prepare a written closure document which restates the program's objectives, lists what was accomplished, what wasn't accomplished, what new behaviors and work practices the Coachee established and what the business value of the program is in the view of the Coachee and Coach. Next steps for development are recommended.

The draft document is reviewed by the Manager and HR Liaison for revisions and additions. The Manager adds his / her perspective on the business impact of the coaching program, dollar return and next steps. All parties review and sign off on the closure document during a completion meeting or conference call.

7.) Pull the Plug Policy. If the coaching program is not working, according to either Coach or Coachee, and the Coach cannot turn it around, then the Coach must pull the plug before further time and money is wasted. Coaching is a privilege to give and to receive.

For more information on our transformational coaching programs for individuals and groups, please visit our website www.ExecutiveCoachGroup.com or contact Trisha D. Scudder, Founder/Principal, ECG, tscudder@executivecoachgroup.com or 212-877-3400.