

# Coaching Leaders

The coaching process, which originated in the world of sport, is now widely used in business. In market growth terms, there has been a virtual explosion of executive coaching. A couple of reasons help to explain this.

## Customization

In recent times, the world has become more 'customized'. I can now go to Burger King and 'have it my way' – rather than eat the standard fare. You can download your favourite Michael Bublé songs from the Apple Store, rather than have to listen to his 200 recordings and so on. Executive coaching appeals to executives precisely because it is customized – providing as much *time* as they want, *when* they want it.

## Accuracy

Most senior executives have been through the 3<sup>rd</sup> level education system. They understand Porters' 5 Forces and the 4 P's of Marketing. They (normally) don't lack the theory – but often become stuck around some gritty implementation detail or difficult interpersonal issue. Coaching provides support with pinpoint accuracy – aimed exactly at the issue(s) which an executive wishes to focus on.

## Realism

Executive coaches introduce realism, helping executives see where they are strong (appreciative inquiry) and where they have development needs. The best coaches do this by combining *support* alongside *challenge* – encouraging authentic conversation, developing listening skills, and confronting contradictory or inappropriate behaviours. They help executives understand thought *patterns*, set realistic goals and give accurate, unflinching feedback.

## Human

Being in a senior executive role can be enormously stressful. There are moments of self-doubt. External events can conspire to overturn the best laid plans and internal politicking can be akin to working in the Kremlin. Coaching can help to make sense of seemingly unrelated events and salve the wounds following minor and major skirmishes. In short, it helps executives to keep a sense of perspective, avoid burn-out and continue to perform at the highest levels.



## Choosing a Coach

As in all recruitment decisions, selection is more art than science. In our experience, executives work best with Coaches who:

Are successful in their own lives (recognizing that no-one is ever in a *perfect* space).

People who are *coaching minded* i.e. neither so prescriptive that they *tell you* what to do – nor empathetic to the point that they would allow you to do anything.

People who 'understand the game'. It's difficult for someone to guide you on managing a difficult relationship with the Chairman or the Board, if they have spent all their life working on a North Sea oil rig (unlikely scenario, but you get the point).

Executive coaching provides a form of brief therapy, which can be enormously valuable to senior managers, both professionally and personally. When the chemistry is right and the skills are in place, the coaching relationship is hugely beneficial. The flowchart below captures the coaching sequence which is normally followed.

# Coaching Roadmap

