



Ten Elements of Good Coaching

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Executive coaching has become a “must-have” for many professionals. From first-line management to the CEO level, managers find the help they receive from seasoned executive coaches to be one of the best investments they’ve ever made.

Executive coaching done properly provides managers with refreshingly unbiased feedback and a deeper self-awareness. It gives managers a unique opportunity to focus on their professional development. It helps them refine existing capabilities, develop new capabilities, and change behaviors that has prevented them from achieving higher levels of performance. It enables new perspectives. It provides encouragement and increases confidence. It gives accountability.

If you’re considering hiring an executive coach or soliciting the coaching services of a boss or mentor, the key to getting the most out of your time and money is following a few best practices. Here are ten elements of good coaching to take into consideration:

- 1. Competent coach** – A seasoned coach who has the knowledge, experience, skills, values, and style that is right for your needs. In particular, look for great facilitators - coaching is 70% questioning, listening, probing, and enabling self-discovery. The other 30% is teaching – possessing the appropriate knowledge, having practical experience in your area of responsibility, and knowing how to succeed within the cultural norms of your environment.
- 2. Eager protégé** – As the protégé, you must be willing to be coached, motivated to learn, and have a mindset that is ready for learning and developing.
- 3. Trust** – A trusting relationship between you and your coach which makes you feel “safe”. You will only be transparent with and accept the advice of a coach you trust and respect. Look for a coach with similar core values.
- 4. Awareness** – The foundation of improvement starts with an accurate assessment of your strengths, weaknesses, needs, aspirations, and the root causes driving your needs. Look beyond the symptoms for the most relevant needs..
- 5. Metrics** – A jointly agreed to and documented development plan with realistic, yet challenging development goals to use as a guide and to maintain accountability.
- 6. Time** – Uninterrupted one-on-one coaching time free of distractions.
- 7. Tools** – A coaching approach that utilizes a variety of tools and techniques including assessments, questioning, reading, videos, self-discovery, analysis, and frameworks.
- 8. Projects** – Skills and knowledge retention are built with application. Include developmental projects and assignments which put your new learning into practice.
- 9. Feedback** - Candid and documented feedback to facilitate your awareness, retention, follow through, and accountability. Seek feedback from people within your 360 circle of influence at the beginning and throughout the coaching process.
- 10. Support** - Encouragement and support reinforces learning. It builds your confidence. Celebrate your accomplishments with your coach and others.

Having the right mindset before you start a coaching engagement can’t be overstated. In a January 2009 Harvard Business Review Research report, Diane Coutu and Carol Kauffman surveyed 140 executive coaches and found that the number one factor that contributes to a successful coaching engagement is the protégé’s “change readiness”, being ready to change. How ready you are to change is not only the number one predictor of successful coaching, but of success in life.

Consider where a change in your skills, attitude, values, or behavior could improve your performance. Seek out the help of a coach, a mentor, or your manager. When you do, follow these ten elements of good executive coaching and watch your performance take off.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.activatingyourambition.com), and president of Alpine Link Corporation (www.alpinelink.com), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.