

EXECUTIVE COACHING IN TURBULENT TIMES

What is going on around us, even as I write this article, is unprecedented. None of us is immune to the anxiety, uncertainty and fear facing us every morning as we ready ourselves for yet another day of the same. What has gone on around us, and within us, this past year would have seemed unimaginable two years ago.

To name a few:

- Corporate malfeasance
- Possible confrontation with North Korea
- Venezuelan oil crisis
- Global Geo-political uncertainty
- Financial Market decline
- Major corporate downsizing
- International economic downturn

What seems to be out of our individual control rolls along unchecked. The ripple effect of the economic and political landscape not only influences our businesses, it deeply touches our families, personal lives and professional futures.

To be relevant, Executive Coaching must bring a perspective that meets realities, not theoretical possibilities. To begin, it has to engender the spirit of taking charge; focusing on what can be done; living in the present; leading through turbulent times.

So, where does Executive Coaching fit into all of this? How can Executive Coaching help? Is Executive Coaching even relevant in the face of such profound events?

The following seven observations come directly out of my experience and the experience of my colleagues as we approach these momentous challenges.

OBSERVATION I: THE BEST COACHES IN TURBULENT TIMES HAVE UNIQUE SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

They are:

- Focused on business objectives
- Focused on leadership issues and initiatives
- Focused on personal management, leadership agendas
- Encourage preemptive and innovative thinking and strategies
- Combine the business knowledge, experience and clinical skills, and a lofty perspective of leadership and business
- High intuition; high speed thinking combined with thoughtful consideration and clarity in communication
- Instinctive knowledge and awareness of cross pollination of industries and functions
- Cutting edge multi-cultural knowledge

- Out of the box thinking and ability to translate into implementation
- High sensitivity and awareness of interpersonal dynamics, communication innuendos, and motivational factors

OBSERVATION II: COMPANIES HAVE A NEW CHALLENGE: WHO GETS PRIORITY?

The major categories are leaders and managers, high potentials, and valuable "fix its." Who gets the priority? Where is the best Return on Investment (ROI)? Do they use a formula to determine who gets coached? Current trends are 50% of coaching funds go to the leadership and "beyond expectation performers" (with possible behavior challenges). 45% of funds go to high potentials and 5% to "fix its." Serious consideration is given to individual circumstances and reasons for coaching.

OBSERVATION III: COACHING IS NOW HELD TO STANDARDS REQUIRED FOR MOST BUSINESS INVESTMENTS

Specific goals, targets, deadlines are set. Metrics are established. Tangible ROI calculations are demanded. Coaching is no longer at arms length and private counseling (without corporate participation) is no longer tolerated.

OBSERVATION IV: COACHING IS NOW A SOUGHT AFTER DEVELOPMENT TOOL, OFTEN INITIATED BY THE INDIVIDUAL

In the past years, most often the manger and/or human resources have determined who needed and who deserved coaching. Today many valued executives and managers are requesting coaching. Coaching has become as sought after and valued as athletic coaching is for the professional and serious amateurs alike. The individual and those around her/him in the organization observe the value.

OBSERVATION V: EXECUTIVE AND MANAGEMENT COACHING CONTINUES TO THRIVE IN TURBULENT TIMES

Corporations and organizations have continued to use executive and management coaching during these times despite layoffs, cost cutting and poor economy. The leadership team, key managers, and key people have to deal with increased pressure to meet stretched targets, reduced resources, tough market conditions. The better they lead and cope the better the ranks and business performs. Coaching is key. The leadership teams will never be without coaching. Key managers and key people will be provided coaching on a selected basis. Truncated versions of coaching will be used in combination with leadership programs.

OBSERVATION VI: ACCREDITATION OR CERTIFICATION FOR COACHES ESSENTIAL FOR CREDIBILITY

- Accreditation
- Training
- Supervision
- Experience criteria
- Competencies
 - metrics
 - testing
 - evaluation
- Certification

In today's world, anyone can call him, or herself, a coach. Corporations have the right to expect the highest level of experience and competency. Certification by respected entities is necessary. The accreditation process must have rigorous standards. Training to include didactic and supervisory components.

OBSERVATION VII: COACHING IS BEING USED FOR TRANSITIONS MORE THAN EVER

Fortunately there has been increased awareness of the complexity and hidden pitfalls in transitions within the workplace. Typical transition scenarios include:

- A higher level position within the organization.
- Moving into another business within a corporation at CEO, executive team, or other significant levels.
- A new merger or acquisition.

Executive Coaching provides increased awareness and sensitivity to the cultural, relationship and personal issues, which are challenging when managing transitions. Individual coaching, team facilitation, leadership/integration feedback all smooth the path for change. Statistics have shown that most often "soft issues" are the cause for early departure of CEOs and other executives.

WHAT ARE THE FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS?

- Accreditation/Certification will be required. Higher standards will be demanded.
- Specific types of coaching will be codified, with areas of specialization within coaching field.
- Confidentiality issues in coaching and the coaching process will be reviewed (e.g. corporate possession of 360° reviews) and changed.

- Individual coaching will never be replaced by training or development group work.

MY ENDING OBSERVATION:

Executive Coaching is in a radical evolution. Difficult times bring unprecedented challenges which lead to creative innovations. So many people and corporations have learned the benefits of “being there” for each other in turbulent times. Each of us has to ask every time we meet a new challenge, what is unique here, how has the present environment shaped this person or this organization? We must then chart new waters. Old solutions to new challenges will not work. Albert Einstein got the essence when he said, “You can’t solve a problem with the same intelligence that created it.” Our challenge as Executive Coaches is to shape our extensive business knowledge, interpersonal expertise and problem solving abilities into a heightened, practical intelligence. Our job is to re-instill in the hearts and minds of our clients: confidence, efficiency, values and trust, so we can all get each other through these unprecedented, turbulent times.

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