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# Choosing an executive coach

**Rose Porterfield Group**

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Here are some things you should look for.

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Chances are you are, or know someone who is, either a business owner or a high-level executive. “Executive coaching” has grown increasingly popular in American business. Executive coaching, as the term implies, involves helping high-level executives to be even more effective in their jobs. Using a coach is justifiably popular because it can be very helpful; it can also be useless or even harmful if the coach is not chosen and used, correctly.

If you are going to take valuable executive time it should only be done for a very cost-effective reason. And being cost-effective means knowing what to look for in a coach and how to use the coach.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A COACH

Not all people with the title “executive coach” are equally prepared. Here are some things you should look for.

**Credentials** – There is no legal requirement for who can be a coach – nor should there be. But the ability to simply use the title “coach” means you have to look carefully at credentials.

A person who has become a coach after a two month training course is unlikely to be effective. You wouldn’t have surgery from someone who had completed a two-month surgery course. Don’t let a poorly trained coach “operate” on you or your top executives.

There are some well-educated people who become coaches but their credentials are uneven. A popular course teaches clinical psychologists to be coaches. The good news: clinical psychologists are arguably the best-trained counselors of the myriad professionals who do counseling. The bad news: many of them have a cursory knowledge of business and do not know what executives really face.

At best a poorly trained coach will waste valuable time. At worst that top decision-making man or woman being coached will be insulted.

Ask the coach: what is your training? How long and from where? How much experience do you have in the business world? Is your coaching experience with C-level managers or middle managers? How many times have you coached executives? Once? Ten times? One thousand times?

**Approach** – Coaching should vary from individual to individual according to needs and should also have a consistent underlying philosophy. Look for the proper balance: a one-size-fits all approach is “canned” and savvy executive women and men will sense that immediately. Your executives are unique, why shouldn’t their coaching program be? On the other hand the coach should be able to articulate his/her general approach and it should make sense. loss of weight.

If the coach does not use high-level psychological assessment the company and the executive are being short-changed. The coach need not be a PhD in psychology trained in psychometrics but he or she should have access to someone who is. An initial assessment is invaluable for giving both the coach and executive a clear picture of their personality, strengths and weaknesses. From this can come the individualized plan based on the individual’s needs. Tests like the MBTI are excellent for group training or situations when rough categorization is helpful but they should not be used as a replacement for more rigorous tests. Request a personal evaluation of a “Five-Factor” test—the gold standard of in-depth psychological assessment and a necessary first step for a coaching plan to be truly developed with you as an individual in mind.

Coaching may vary from four months to one year or more. The coach should be able to clearly articulate the justification for the length of time suggested.

## USING THE COACH

The coach has two clients – the owners or board and the individual executive. The coach should be very clear with all parties involved about what will happen and what information goes to whom. In some cases executives fear that coaches will carry sensitive information back to their management. In some cases companies fear that the coach will reinforce the wrong attitudes. Here are some guidelines for using the coach.

**Collaboration** – The coach should work primarily for the individual executive. The coach should share some information and make some reports – as outlined below – but the individual executive should be the focus of the effort.

Let's face it, for a woman or man to reach this high level in the organization means that most of what they do they do right. They are successful. They know what they need to do or can be shown with some discussion. They should be collaborators, not passive recipients.

**Reports** – Much of the time, the company is going to want some feedback on regular basis. That information should be minimal and the individual should know word for word what information is being shared.

**Results** – Here is where the real measure of coaching effectiveness comes in, far more important than any report. What is the outcome?

Coaches will tell you – quite correctly – that change in behavior takes time. Here is something else that is also true: the company should see some immediate and positive change in behavior.

## EXECUTIVE COACHING IS A WONDERFUL TOOL

If coaches demonstrate:

1. good credentials, e.g., through formal training and/or on-the-job work experience
2. experience
3. demonstrated results

By all means consider using them. The payoff can be huge. For an example, a five percent improvement in communication skills in a typical Vice President drops about \$100,000 to the bottom line—that's \$100,000 of real money. In addition coaching decreases likelihood of costly turnover and can greatly enhance the individual's—and their staff's—enjoyment of the job.

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