

COACHING

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It fits the pattern---a mid level executive with a track record of outstanding accomplishments. Bill has tremendous energy; he is very smart with strong analytical skills. He has clearly mastered the technical side of his field. His projects are noted within the industry. The company's reputation for innovation is directly impacted by his efforts.

But something has changed. While previous promotions came rapidly, the last one was a number of years ago. His mentor retired two years ago. It was a significant loss for him. Bill senses that others do not view him with the same admiration as before. He is strangely uncomfortable.

Expectations are different now. The new CEO still emphasizes results and execution, but she has added the language of vision, values, and collaboration. This is new, as the Board intended. She notices Bill. She sees his accomplishments and strengths. But she also sees the side of him that has not been developed. The phrase "people skills" comes to mind. She also thinks of "leadership," "relationships," and "communication." She is not sure what to call it, but she is absolutely clear that it must be developed in Bill for him to stay. He is doing better than in the past and she notices his efforts to improve. But the program for the company's future depends on a leadership group that can engage the "hearts and minds" of employees. And the employees are watching to see if she can deliver. Bill is highly visible. Improvement is not enough: he must master it. She surmises he can become a shining light in her program, but he needs some help.

For his part, Bill knows that this side of him has not been developed. Over the years he has been able to compensate rather than deal with it. He also recognizes he must change. He has made an effort over the past two years to be more people oriented, but he is not sure how those efforts have been received. The little feedback he has been able to get has been mixed. He is not sure of what to do now.

Bill is the ideal candidate for coaching.

Clear understanding of the variables that contribute most strongly to coaching success is essential for companies and individuals who use outside coaches. Without this understanding, success becomes difficult to predict and improbable to attain. Similarly, if otherwise capable coaches enter coaching engagements without a shared understanding, they most likely may end up disappointing themselves and their clients.

This common understanding for coaching success is based on five variables:

Want: The individual must “want” something he or she does not currently have. While this sounds obvious, many clients will engage a coach based on what the supervisor or Company wants rather than what the individual wants. The ‘want’ may be a new position, to be perceived in a different way, a different relationship with someone, a skill, or perhaps to avoid a negative outcome. The “want” needs to be something the individual is not readily capable of achieving on his or her own.

The coach can help the individual “discover” his/her ‘want.’ This is often a major focus of the coaching when there is a disconnect between the “needs” of the Company and the desires of the individual. The important thing to note is that the “want” needs to be clear to the individual and the coach for the coaching to be effective. Bill wants to become a key player in the new leadership team and knows he must change to achieve this.

Assessment: Beginning a coaching engagement without an assessment is like beginning a trip without an itinerary. While you may get where you are going and enjoy some aspects of the journey, you will not get there quickly and may confuse those trying to travel with you. You may even forget where you are going. A comprehensive assessment should include a 360 and/or perceptual interviews that provide a basis for understanding how the individual’s strengths and weaknesses are viewed. It should include a work history to understand how the person got to this point. It also should include a personal instrument to help the person see what drives her behavior and how that differs from other people. The assessment is the foundation for a development plan and provides the roadmap for success in the coaching engagement.

Development plan: Without a plan, coaching tends to deal with the situation or circumstances of the moment. This approach generally disappoints the individual, the company, and the coach. The plan is absolutely essential. It must specify the desired outcomes of the engagement, the strengths and development opportunities of the individual, specific development goals, measurements, feedback, and timetables. This is the hard science of coaching that does the most to ensure coaching success.

Understanding: Often the need for coaching addresses an area in which the individual lacks a basic framework of understanding. While Bill had a general awareness that he needed to be more effective with “people” he did not have a clear picture of how to approach this. Some, perhaps significant, progress can be made through situational coaching. For mastery, however, Bill will need to become competent in what will be a new “domain” for him. The coach must be able to provide a learning experience in a way that respects the individual’s time and learning style. Bill will learn that mastery in this new domain is the key to achieving his goals.

Feedback: It is commonly known that the higher the individual is in the organization, the less feedback she solicits or receives. Research, particularly in the area of emotional intelligence, suggests that lack of feedback is a primary contributor to executive failure. To be effective, coaching must provide tremendous amounts of unvarnished feedback. This is important in all phases of coaching, but particularly important when the individual is implementing behavioral changes and needs to determine the impact of those changes.

Bill knew what he needed and the coach validated the need. The assessment and analysis of the coach gave him a much better understanding of how he was perceived and what change strategies would work best for him. Through learning models and focused readings he gained an understanding of what we call the “people side” that enabled him to manage his behavioral change, measure its impact, and make adjustments. His coach helped him create a development plan. He not only knows how to seek meaningful feedback, but models it for others.