Coaching for Women

STRATEGIC **TALENT** SOLUTIONS

Executive Coaching Overview

Why do companies engage executive coaches?

In the past, coaches were hired to 'fix' problem performers. Today, coaches are typically employed to develop the capabilities of high potential performers.

Harvard Business Review[1] conducted a study about why companies hire executive coaches. The top three reasons were,

- Develop high potentials or facilitate transition (48%)

- Act as a sounding board (26%)

- Address derailing behavior (12%)

Research indicates that coaching is a worthwhile investment. Manchester Consulting Group[2] examined the impact of executive coaching in a study that included 100 executives, mostly from Fortune 1000 companies. Benefits to *organizations* included gains in productivity, quality, and customer service along with reductions in customer complaints and costs. Benefits to *executives* who actively participated in the experience included better working relationships across the organization, increased job satisfaction, and reduced conflict.

Coaches often serve as "thought partners" to executives seeking to accelerate their leadership skills to attain goals. While effective leaders are strategic thinkers with the ability to manage complexity, they do not accomplish goals in a vacuum. Leaders achieve results by coordinating the efforts of others. Leaders can craft the vision, set the strategy and direct efforts, but getting the work done effectively and sustainably through others requires relationship-building, communication, and people leadership skills.

Public sector principals and officers participated in a Booz Allen Hamilton's ROI study[3] to assess the business impact of coaching. Improved teamwork, increases in quality of consulting, retention, and increased team member satisfaction produced at least $500,000 of annualized benefit to the business. According to Booz Allen Hamilton's calculations, the ROI of coaching was 689%. Senior leaders surveyed after the coaching experience reported intangible benefits such as,

- Improved teamwork (58%); for example, one executive was more attuned to behaviors and reactions; as a result, the team is accomplishing more and she is getting more buy-in for ideas and proposals from peers and organizational leaders.

- Team member satisfaction improvements (54%); increased productivity and retention resulted from higher team member satisfaction.

- Significant improvements in relationships with peers and team members (53%); by encouraging more open discussions, giving feedback, and mentoring others, leaders built bridges with peers and were better able to anticipate and resolve conflict.

Results like these suggest that executive coaching can help leaders increase productivity, build organizational capabilities, stay focused, meet objectives, and improve working relationships – leading to enhanced job satisfaction, less conflict and increased organizational commitment for themselves and their teams.

Why focus Executive Coaching on Women?

Gender Gaps

Coaching can accelerate development for leaders who want to advance their careers but don't know how, or who recognize that the skills that got them to their current level will not take them to the next. This benefits the executive as well as the sponsoring organization. However, there continues to be substantial divides between men and women in leadership roles. While men and women are fairly equally represented at the entry level and first-line manager roles, the gap widens as career progress. A DDI study[4] demonstrated how a relatively nominal gap in early leadership roles can increase over time. Their 2011 survey found that 59% of first time leaders were men while 41% were women. At mid-manager and senior manager levels, however, only 27% of leaders were women.

Because coaching can identify and correct career limiting behaviors while building on strengths, coaching serve to propel careers to the C-suite. If executive coaching is an investment made at higher leadership levels, however, then more men than women are likely to be targeted for this career-enhancing opportunity. This can contribute to women getting left behind, thereby perpetuating the "glass ceiling" effect. Interestingly, research by McKinsey and Company[5] indicates that companies with at least three or more female executives outperformed companies with no women in executive roles on a number of performance indicators, including financial performance. If having more women leaders at the top of the house enhances performance, then developing women is not just a "diversity initiative" but rather - a business imperative.

Fewer women in top leadership roles

Research[7] (2011) focused on high-potential MBA's found that both men and women negotiated starting salaries and higher level positions at about the same rate (men, 52%; women, 47%). Gender differences appeared later, however, as these MBAs progressed in their careers. Men were significantly more likely than women to counter their first post-MBA job offer by asking for a higher salary in the next job (men, 50%; women, 31%).

While there are many possible reasons for fewer women in top leadership roles, including personal and family reasons, another cause might be that women are less likely than men to ask for what they want. In their book *Women Don't Ask* [6] Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever cite cultural norms and values that prevent women from being more assertive on their own behalves. For example, "eight times as many men as women negotiated their starting salaries." (p. 5) Over time, small difference can grow to increasingly larger gaps, both in salary and advancement. Men have a greater propensity than women to ask for what they want, and continue negotiating higher raises and increases over their careers. As the authors write, women "ask for less when they do ask, and they usually get less, too. The net result is a huge imbalance in the distribution of resources and opportunities for men and women." (p. 9)

Jo Miller, CEO and founder of Coaching for Women, conducted extensive interviews with leaders and uncovered 12 key skills necessary for advancing in organizations. The top four[7] are

- Exuding an aura of credibility and authority
- Making accomplishments visible, instead of working hard and hoping the work will speak for itself
- Becoming a person of influence
- Building a powerful network with key organization players

While these skills are important for men and women, women's *perceptions* about behaviors tend to differ from men's. For example, many women cringe at the notion of leveraging their relationships, negotiating for their advancement, or advertising accomplishments – all of which are essential for advancement. Coaching can help women reframe "political skills" and "influencing for success" as important to furthering the collective good rather than personal gain.

Why focus coaching efforts on women?

Whether it's due to societal messages, personal choices, or other factors, women tend to ask for what they want less frequently than men. They keep accomplishments quiet, not compete directly, and focus being likeable rather than direct and assertive – all of which can limit promotability. According to Catalyst's research (2011)[8], making achievements known and gaining access to powerful others had the greatest impact on women's career advancement. And yet, many women avoid self-promotion and networking because they lack the necessary skills, or have negative beliefs about behaviors they associate with being too pushy, abrasive or using contacts for personal gain.

Coaching can help women learn how to assert themselves with confidence and credibility, while leveraging interpersonal skills and values to influence outcomes that benefit their teams, companies and families.

Even if women want coaching, they may accept this as a perk for leaders in pay grades above their own, rather than make a case for their own advancement. Thus, fewer women will derive the benefits of coaching, which can limit advancement to executive level positions. For that reason, smart companies are proactive in identifying women in entry level to mid-level management roles who could accelerate as leaders through the structured, targeted supported offered by executive coaching.

Coaching for Women

A key component of coaching programs for women is guiding participants in defining powerful, empowering and clear *leadership identities*[9]. This includes identifying strengths and accomplishments to leverage when leading others, as well as in negotiations and advancement opportunities. One way to close gaps between men and women is to make sure that women arm themselves with information; thus, an important component of programs designed for women should assure that women gather their facts in advance of positioning a request or negotiating. Research has shown that when women anchor requests to external realities - and they negotiate for reasons beyond personal gain - gender differences go away. In some cases, women outperform men in negotiations when they campaign for others.[10]

Women as leaders have much to offer organizations in terms of growth and financial success. Coaching women–sooner rather than later in their careers - can help retain these valuable resources and optimize their unique talents. Working with women to balance their lives, assert themselves constructively, and build on successes adds diversity and breadth of thought to strategic decision making, which can help companies realize the competitive advantages offered by women in senior roles.

STS "I-PLAN" Coaching Program (6 – 9 months)

While the essential structure of coaching programs for men and women are similar, the content for women can differ so as to emphasize skill building in areas that are traditionally more challenging for women. Based on research and a powerful commitment to supporting female leaders, STS "I-Plan" coaching program for women guides participants in,

- Creating a leadership vision and identity that serves as anchor for professional development and goal setting [9]
- Gaining greater insight about who they are and what matters most, from which they optimize strengths and either develop or work around weaknesses enhancing self-confidence
- Promoting accomplishments in ways that positively and credibly communicate their expertise
- Building productive networks and leveraging mutually beneficial, powerful relationships
- Researching and anchoring expectations to market realities
- Identifying and overcoming self-defeating or limiting beliefs, assumptions and thoughts that have them settle for 'good enough'
- Positively influencing others

The I-Plan program can be delivered individually, where the coach and participant complete the process one-on-one, or within the context of both group and individual sessions, where portions of the program are individualized between coach and participant, while some parts conducted in facilitated group settings, within a community of women leaders.

I-PLAN

Insight

Research has shown that forming a well-defined sense of professional identity is an important component of leadership development efforts focused on women.

During the "**Insight**" phase, participants complete inventories and questionnaires to help them reflect on who they are and what matters most. We explore the individual's readiness for coaching. If she is not open to being coached, not interesting in self-discovery, or content to maintain the 'status quo,' we identify this early and suggest that the individual not participate in the program.

Our "Insight" process uses values and personality inventories, multi-rater evaluations, and observations to paint a comprehensive portrait of the participant including values, motives, strengths, opportunities, leverage points, and potential derailers. Together, coach and participant mine the data for patterns, key themes, and messages.

Planning

Planning begins with creating a desired future; coaches use processes from Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Psychology to elicit inspirational and highly motivating future states. We customize our approach to the individual so she pulls the data from the Insights phase to create a personal narrative. The narrative serves as an anchor for who she is and who she aspires to be in her personal and professional life.

During *Planning*, coach and participant identify additional skill building opportunities. For example, the participant may choose to read, attend webinars or in-person classes, get certified in a relevant area of expertise, etc.

She will also practice skills in the real world using Action Learning methods; for example, she may have to identify something she wants at work and negotiate for it. Or, deliver a tough message that she has been avoiding. Action learning 'assignments' are meaningful and focused on building skill in an area that is important for the long-term fulfillment of her professional vision. Undertaking these tasks with the support of a coach enables participants to reflect on the activity, talk about challenges, celebrate successes, and reflect on learnings that can be leveraged in similar situations in the future.

One output of the Planning process is a written Individual Development Plan (IDP) with goals that are challenging but attainable, measurable, and with specific dates – all of which lead to the fulfillment of the participant's long-term vision.

I-PLAN

Leverage

Using the guiding philosophy that no man … or woman … is an island and that none of us are "self-made," participants identify resources they can leverage. Who are the powerful and empowering people in their network, and how can these individuals help participants to advance projects and goals?

Since women are often reluctant to ask for what they want, we work with women to build their confidence and skill this area. We also explore barriers and limitations to overcome, by leveraging interpersonal strengths (internal levers) or people in the network (external levers) who can help remove or reduce obstacles.

Action

Once goals are planned, coach and participant meet weekly (in person, by phone, or by email) to discuss actions, review progress, and reflect on lessons learned. We adjust plans and activities accordingly to keep the process relevant and meaningful.

During the "Action" portion of the program, coaches engage participants in exploring new ways of doing things, evaluate options, and actively experiment with new behaviors that can enhance performance in the pursuit of goals.

Next Steps

The final weeks of the I-Plan program are used to reflect on lessons learned, celebrate successes, and design next steps for on-going growth after the coaching relationship ends. We refine the plan to cover the next 6-12 months. This may include identifying supportive peers, outside resources, mentors and internal coaches who can continue supporting the individual's growth. Also, other courses, reading, and formal education to accelerate growth. The program closes with an individual plan to help the participant stay on track after the formal coaching program ends.

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