

Setting Up a Successful Coaching Program

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Have you been considering a professional coaching program for your organization? Or perhaps you are implementing one now, or have implemented one in the past. Executives who look to coaching programs to help their organizations may include:

- An HR leader who is thinking of using coaching as one tool to address low satisfaction with senior leadership as expressed in employee survey ratings;
- An HR professional designing a leadership or supervisory development program for emerging leaders or first-line supervisors;
- A president, CEO or secretary of a federal agency who wishes to provide executives with coaches to improve organizational leadership and performance; or
- An executive looking to implement a system-wide change, and who would like to provide key internal champions with coaches to guide them through the phases of the transition.

A coaching program can provide your leaders with the space, reflection time and perspective to do the hard work of self-growth and change. From my experience in implementing coaching programs,

there are several important tips you will want to consider to ensure your organization's program is set up for success.

1. Develop and Implement Strategy and Communication Plans for the Coaching Program

What is the organization's purpose in implementing the coaching program? What is the organizational goal the coaching program will support? Who will benefit, and how? What can participants expect from the coaching program, and what shouldn't they expect? What is expected of participants? Do participants know the differences between coaching, consulting and psychotherapy?

An organization should explore these questions and determine its goals and expectations as part of a plan to guide the coaching program. It can also develop and share messaging through a comprehensive communications plan targeted for specific groups within the organization. For example, if the coaching is aimed at providing support to emerging leaders, then the organization should prepare customized communications for potential participants as well as for their supervisors.

It's ideal to disseminate this content through multiple media and at different times to increase



messaging absorption. The coaching program manager may again share key points with participants through a check-in at the halfway mark of their coaching engagements.

2. Integrate a 360-Degree Assessment Process into the Program

Most coachees in an organizational setting appreciate and benefit from feedback through a 360-degree assessment. The assessment provides

data that can be a foundation for the coaching experience. Coachees may not realize or fully understand how their behavior may come across to

their peers, direct reports, supervisors or customers. Reviewing the results of the assessment report can be eye-opening, affirming and discouraging all at once. It provides an opportunity to reflect

honestly in a safe space and with a trusted guide, and to use the feedback to select or further refine the issues they will address during their coaching.

3. Have Executive Leadership Champion the Program

Senior leaders send a powerful message when they openly use and endorse coaching. One recent executive client used our executive coaching program and then sent a message to all supervisors

in his department disclosing his participation and recommending the program for all supervisors. Enrollment among supervisors rose dramatically after he sent out that message.

4. Keep Individual Coaching 100 Percent Confidential

Trust between a coach and client is foundational to the success of any coaching program. Confidentiality can become a challenge in a coaching program when employers or supervisors want to check that the coachees are working toward

the program goals or their individual performance objectives. Supervisors or the main program client may be tempted to ask coaches to provide briefings or written records. Such requests reduce the coach's ability to establish trust with individual clients and could tarnish the workforce's perception of the program's ability to maintain confidentiality.

Some programs encourage supervisors to provide their perspectives on the coachee's strengths and developmental areas in an initial goal-setting meeting with the coachee and coach. If a program plans such meetings, then the initial communications launch must share this intention to manage expectations across the board.



5. Coaching Should be Encouraged, but Not Required

There is an old saying that “you can bring a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” Employers will rarely meet with success forcing an employee to receive coaching if the employee doesn’t believe she or he needs it. At best, the coaching will be ineffective, and at worst, the forced nature of the process will create a broader negative stigma around the program that discourages participation. In some cases, an organization may need

to use coaching to address performance issues. While coaching can work in such cases, helping motivated employees to get even better through coaching will be a much more effective approach.

Instead of requiring coaching, communicate the importance and urgency of the program. Messaging on the purpose and goals of the program and the problems the program is addressing should be part of the communications launch.

6. Offer Flexible Meeting and Language Arrangements

The meeting venue needs to serve both the coach’s and the coachee’s needs, rather than following a format prescribed by the organization. For example, providing coaches on-site for staff may seem ideal, but it may not work well for staff who are remotely based or who prefer to meet with their coaches after hours. In these types of circumstances, video and telephone conference calls may be the best option.

Most coaches are trained to work with coachees on the phone, using Skype and other videoconferencing technology, and in person. Any coaching

program worth its salt will recruit and screen for coaches with a successful track record of delivering their coaching through different modalities.

Coaching foreign nationals overseas requires special consideration. Coachees who speak English as their second or third language may prefer to be coached in their native tongue. Identifying a cadre of certified, U.S.-based and host country coaches, where available, to provide options for a multinational workplace can reduce cultural, logistical and language barriers.

7. Strengthen Coachee Commitment to Participate by Using a Coaching Agreement

Introducing an agreement between the coach and coachee helps establish trust and sets an ethical standard with participants. A coaching agreement

should explain, among other things, the rules of confidentiality, the period of performance of the coaching, coaching frequency, expectations,

responsibilities of the coach and coachee, what they can expect from the coaching program manager, number of sessions and the end date. Coaches should discuss the agreement with their coachees. Have the agreement signed by both

parties and provide a copy to the coaching program manager. These steps create an expectation for the coachees, communicate the significance of their time and effort, and can strengthen their commitment to the program.

8. Evaluate Coaching Programs

Another best practice is to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the coaching program. The coaching program manager could do this through a combination of methods that include a web-based survey of participants and coaches who have completed a coaching engagement. Targeted focus groups or individual interviews could provide another source of data. The coaching program manager may use this information to adjust the program and improve client satisfaction. In addition, it provides evidence of whether individual and organizational changes have taken place, and

whether the organization achieved specific business results.

Coaching programs can provide your organization's executives, leaders, first-line supervisors and high-potential staff the space, time and insights they need to excel in their jobs and transform your organization from within. Making sure the program has the right supports in place will help keep the expectations clear and the process smooth, productive and fruitful for individual clients, their supervisors and the manager of the program alike.

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SETTING UP A SUCCESSFUL COACHING PROGRAM

**1 DEVELOP STRATEGY AND
COMMUNICATION PLANS** 

2 INTEGRATE A **360°
ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

**3 ————— HAVE —————
EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP
CHAMPION**  

**4 —KEEP COACHING—
100% CONFIDENTIAL**

**5 COACHING *ENCOURAGED*,
*NOT REQUIRED***

**6 FLEXIBLE MEETING AND
LANGUAGE ARRANGEMENTS**

**7 USE A COACHING
AGREEMENT** 

**8 EVALUATE
COACHING PROGRAMS**