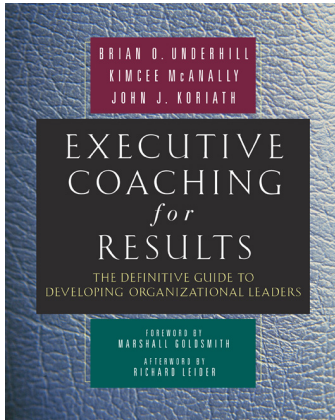


Executive Coaching Program Design Checklist



Anyone responsible for executive coaching in his/her organization will benefit from this checklist. We have compiled all the key questions that must be asked for any executive coaching effort to be successful.

This excerpt is taken from the final chapter of Executive Coaching for Results: The Definitive Guide to Developing Organizational Leaders (Berrett-Koehler, 2007).

Establishing a successful coaching program requires thoughtful design as early as possible in the process. Recent coaching success stories, such as those featured in this book, began by carefully planning their coaching strategies from the outset. Today, many of these firms have documented successes with large numbers of senior executives.

The key questions to consider in establishing, or enhancing a coaching program, have been compiled into this one place, based on our research and many years of designing coaching programs with organizations. Even coaching initiatives that have been more ad hoc in nature can be steadily improved by thinking through and acting upon some of the questions presented here.

Link Coaching to Leadership Development and Talent Management

A coaching effort should be linked to a company's leadership development strategy (which ought to be linked to business strategy). Otherwise coaching may be too ad hoc - and not necessarily moving leaders closer to organizational objectives. How will coaching fit within the leadership development strategy? What percent of a leader's development should come from coaching? And, how much coaching should be provided to different levels of leaders?

The leadership development strategy also identifies the competencies leaders need for future organizational success, and in turn, how coaching should support this. The purpose of coaching can then be identified (i.e. retain high potentials, accelerate transition, improve leadership capability).

Talent management systems identify which leaders are eligible for coaching and what type of development they will need. How will coaching be linked to the talent management approach (if any)? Which leaders should be eligible for coaching? How will coaching outcomes be tracked in the talent management system? Do all leaders in a particular level automatically receive coaching? Or do leaders engage with a coach at their own discretion?

Finally if coaching is being used for performance problem employees, will that use continue? How will requests for performance issues be handled if coaching turns out not to be the right answer?

Culture and Leadership Support

Our research, not surprisingly, found that an organization's culture plays a major role in its support of people development and coaching. What are the organization's stated and subtle views toward people development? What is the history of coaching in the company? How is coaching perceived in the organization (for those high potential / high performers, or for those in trouble?) For unfriendly coaching cultures, find leaders willing to give it a try, secure a high profile executive sponsor, add coaching to existing training programs, provide coaches for new leaders, or even use coaching those at the first-line supervisor level.

Senior leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping an organization's culture. What is the senior leadership's view on coaching? Do these leaders work with coaches? Do others know these leaders work with coaches? Are these leaders publicly supporting coaching? With non-supportive leadership, identify a credible executive sponsor for the effort. Tell potential coachees they have been "specially selected" for the program. Discontinue the use of coaching for performance problem leaders and let some time elapse before starting a new program.

If a coaching program has not begun in earnest, selecting the right leaders to go first is important. They will serve as positive examples for others. Who are the right leaders to begin first (those well-regarded by the rest of the organization and willing to endorse coaching)? Collecting and publicizing testimonials from these leaders will carry great weight for other candidates.

Marketing/Communications

A coaching program will need some level of internal marketing to properly position the effort throughout the organization. What is the best approach to marketing the program? Consider such options as an internal website, marketing to worldwide leadership development and human resources, executive sponsor support, coachee testimonials, aggregated success data, etc. Alternatively, a more limited or exclusive program may not need a marketing effort at all.

Communicating the roles and responsibilities of all parties associating with coaching is also key. How will the executive be prepared for coaching - Will they know what coaching is about, and what is expected of them? What about the local HR staff, or key stakeholders of the leader? The coachee's boss (call him/her the sponsor) is a major player and would benefit from focused communications clarifying his/her role as well.

Matching

Triaging coaching requests ensures coaching is really the right intervention for a given request. Who will conduct this triage (i.e. HR, leadership development) and how will it be done (i.e. phone interview, online request form)?

Research with leaders who have received coaching revealed the personal match between leaders and their coach to be an absolutely critical factor. How is matching to be made? Is the leader assigned a coach, does the leader select from 2-3 options, or will the leader choose a coach from a large list? Does the leader interview possible coach candidates, and if so, are interviews via phone or in person? Should the leader be encouraged to pick a coach of similar style/background (for camaraderie) or a vastly different coach (to challenge him or her)? Some organizations produce a guide or handbook for leaders to use to assist them in selecting a coach.

Once an assignment is underway, what is done to verify that the match is still a good one, and when is such verification done? Should leadership development or human resources check in with the leader? Or should a short survey be administered to measure the leader's satisfaction to date?

What process will be followed if negative feedback is obtained? Is the coach replaced immediately or given a chance to rectify? Does the problem lie with the coach or perhaps with the leader? (If another coach is assigned, will the same problems emerge?)

Instrumentation

Nearly all coaching begins with some sort of feedback process. How will feedback be collected (interviews, corporate leadership competency 360, off-the-shelf 360 too)? If a coach has his or her own leadership tool or 360 instrument, can they use it? Determine who has access to these results as well.

What other instruments can be used? Can coaches use any instruments they recommend, or will there be limits? How much money can be spent on additional instruments, if any?

Assignment Activities

How long should assignments last? Do all leaders receive coaching for six months, for twelve months, or some other standard length of time? Should these lengths vary by leader or level in the organization? Can leaders upgrade from shorter to longer lengths if desired? Who pays for coaching (the leader's budget, central corporate budget, or some combination)?

How often is coaching conducted? What is the expected mixture of face-to-face, telephone and online coaching? Do coaches/leaders or the organization determine this mixture?

Organizations vary on the types of activities to be conducted during coaching; some outline exactly the steps and activities, others allow coaches to use their discretion. Some of the many activities to be considered include action plan generation, reviewing an action plan with manager, assessment tools, behavioral rehearsal/practice, leader following up with key stakeholders, coach following up with key stakeholders, coach locating resources (books, conferences) for leader, and follow up mini surveys. Also, will coaches have enough time and budget to shadow the leader – observing him or her in various settings?

Many organizations require some filing of action plans. Will such filing be a part of the process? Where does the plan get filed, and who sees it? Is there a template plan that ought to be followed?

Finally, what happens when assignments conclude? Should coaching continue informally in a senior advisor capacity? If so, will the coach's time for this be reimbursed in some way?

Outcomes

A variety of metrics can be put into a coaching program. The first (Level One) is satisfaction. Is the leader satisfied with the coach? Will this satisfaction be measured, and, if so, how? Will human resources or leadership development check in with the leader from time to time? Or will there be some sort of automated survey process?

Did the leader make progress back on the job as a result of coaching (Level Three)? This can be accomplished through a repeat 360 or a mini-survey (a very short 360 measuring improvement). An assessment from the manager of the leader being coached is another way to view this.

Level Four measures the impact on the business, or the return-on-investment (ROI). Many organizations seek to measure ROI but find it difficult to quantify. Will there be an effort to obtain ROI of coaching? If so, how? The most commonly attempted method currently is to ask the leader's assessment of business impact and to create a figure from this assessment. Another version looks at whether coached leaders are retained by the organization for a longer period of time, than uncoached leaders and to apply a dollar value to not losing the leader.

Internal Coaches

Coaching benefits can often be extended to more levels of management through the use of internal coaches. Some companies may use internal coaches exclusively if their culture is unique. Will internal coaches be used, and, if so, where? How will these coaches be trained? What are the boundaries of confidentiality for them?

The greatest challenge of an internal coach is time. Do they have enough time to do this job? Will they also have their traditional responsibilities, or is coaching their only requirement? Are internals viewed as credible and trustworthy in the organization?

Coach Sourcing

Locating high quality coaches is an ongoing challenge for the human resources and leadership development professional. How many coaches does your firm need, and where does it need them? Coaches can be found through full service coaching vendors, coach referral networks, recommendations from other companies, professional associations and the web. Many coaches reach out to leadership development professionals and directly to the company's leaders as well.

Screening these coaches is another great challenge. What will be the key criteria to use in screening coaches? What will be the relative importance of such criteria as business experience (line and/or staff), coaching experience, industry experience, match to the organization's culture, ability to build rapport, advanced degree, location, cost, instrument certification and coaching certification? What process will be used to screen the coaches (i.e. completing a form, interviews with corporate personnel, day long assessment process, accepting coaches from preferred vendors, etc.)?

Coach Community

Building a pool of coaches can represent a strong partnership between the organization and its coaches. Once coaches are accepted into the pool, will they receive an orientation? If so, is it held just one time, quarterly, virtually?

Coaches greatly appreciate ongoing communication with the firm and with each other. Will there be ongoing conference calls with the coaches, and, if so, how often will they take place? What other information can be shared with the coaches (i.e. press releases, organizational restructuring, annual reports)? Will the firm host an annual (or some other periodical) forum with all coaches in the pool? Who pays for this event and for its associated travel expenses?

Logistical Considerations

Does purchasing/procurement need to be involved in the contracting process along the way? Will there be a formal contract and/or nondisclosure that coaches need to complete? If coaching is paid out of different budgets, is there a relatively easy way to establish these contracts internally?

How do coaches invoice for services and how often? How are travel expenses handled (part of the contract or as additional items)? What travel policy should coaches follow, and how will the prescribed policy be communicated to them? Do coaches have access to the company travel department? Can coaches receive access to the corporate intranet or receive entry badges at facilities?

Finally, an internal resource is generally needed to manage the coaching operation. Alternatively, external vendor(s) can handle these responsibilities. Who will play this role, and how much of their time will be required? How much information will be tracked, and how should this information be stored? Will a Coaching Management System be employed to oversee everything?

Coaching Program Design Checklist

This worksheet frames most of the proceeding considerations into a simple questionnaire that can be used to complete the design of the program. Although not all questions will have immediate answers, at least they should all be considered in the design or enhancement of a program.

Link to Leadership Development and Talent Management	
How will coaching link to the leadership development strategy?	
What % of a leader's development will come from coaching?	
How much coaching is to be provided to different levels of leader?	
What is the main purpose of coaching (i.e. develop leaders, retain high potentials, accelerate transition, etc.)?	
How is coaching linked to the talent management system (if any)?	
Will the talent management system identify which leaders are eligible for coaching?	
Are coaching activities/outcomes to be tracked in the talent management system?	
Is coaching to be used for performance management problems? If not, how will performance management coaching requests be rerouted?	

Culture and Leadership Support	
What is the culture's attitude toward development and coaching?	
What is the history of coaching in the organization?	
How is coaching perceived in the company (favorably? Negatively?)	

Culture and Leadership Support

Do senior leaders work with coaches? Do they publicly endorse coaching?

If coaching has not yet begun, which leaders should be the first to go? (Consider those good role models first)

Is there a plan to collect testimonials from leaders to share with other prospective clients?

Marketing/Communications

How will the program be marketed (if at all)? Consider: internal website, marketing to worldwide leadership development and human resources, executive sponsor support, coachee testimonials, etc.

Will there be a communication effort for all parties, to clarify their roles in the coaching process? (i.e. coaching recipient, leader's manager, local HR, other key stakeholders)

Matching

How will matching be made? Are leaders given 2-3 options, do they select from a list, or is a coach simply assigned?

Will there be a guide for leaders to assist them in selecting a coach?

Do leaders interview coaches? If so, are interviews via phone or in person?

Will there be a process to verify the match was a good one? (i.e. LD check in with leader, short satisfaction survey)

Instrumentation

How will feedback be collected (interviews, off-the-shelf 360, customized 360)?

Instrumentation

Can coaches use any tools they recommend? Or are only certain tools approved for use in the organization? If so, which ones?

How will additional tools be paid for? Will there be a budget?

Assignment Activities

What are the assignment lengths? What is the expected mix of face-to-face/telephone/online coaching?

How often is coaching expected to occur? (Or is this up to the leader and coach?)

Which activities (if any) are to be requisite parts of the coaching program? (i.e. action plan generation, reviewing action plan with manager, assessment tools, behavioral rehearsal/practice, leader following up with key stakeholders, coach following up with key stakeholders, coach locating resources (i.e. books, conferences) for leader, follow up mini surveys, shadowing, etc.)

Will there be an official method for filing action plans? Who sees these plans? Is there a standard template to use?

How is coaching paid for? (Central LD budget? leader's budget? combination?)

What happens when assignments finish? Is there some informal "senior advisor" role for the coach?

Outcomes

Which outcome metrics will be used, and how will data be collected? (i.e. leader self-assessment, boss assessment, repeat 360, mini 360.)

Will leader satisfaction with coach be obtained? How and when?

Is there an effort to measure return on investment? If so, how?

Internal Coaches

Will internal coaches be used? If so, for what level(s) of leader?	
How are internal coaches trained? What are the criteria to become an internal coach?	
Do internal coaches have enough time to coach and carry out their other responsibilities?	
What are the confidentiality boundaries for internal coaches?	

Coach Sourcing

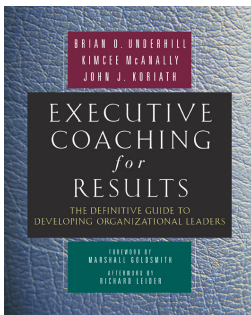
How many coaches are required, and where?	
How will coaches be found? (current vendors, referral networks, other company recommendations, professional associations, web,; coaches who contact your leaders or yourself)	
What criteria will be used to screen coaches? (i.e. as business experience (line and/or staff), coaching experience, industry experience, match the organization's culture, ability to build rapport, advanced degree, location, cost, instrument certification and coaching certification?)	
How will coaches be screened? (completing a form, interviews with corporate personnel, day long assessment process, accepting coaches from preferred vendors)	

Coach Community

How will coaches be oriented to the organization?	
What ongoing communication efforts will be used? (quarterly conference calls, press releases, organization announcements, etc.)	
Will there be a regular gathering of coaches? How often and who pays for this?	

Logistical Considerations

Does purchasing need to be involved in the contracting with coaches and coaching providers? What about a non-disclosure agreement? Is there an easy way to open a coaching contract (especially if coaching is paid for by different budgets)?	
How do coaches invoice for services, and how often?	
What travel policies should coaches follow? Do coaches have access to a company travel department?	
Can coaches receive access to corporate intranet or entry badges for facilities?	
Is there an internal resource to manage all coaching activities and/or an external vendor to do the same?	
What information should this resource track, how will it be stored, and who will have access to this information?	



Executive Coaching for Results: The Definitive Guide to Developing Organizational Leaders (Berrett-Koehler, 2007)

Authors:

Brian O. Underhill brian@coach-source.com

Kimcee McAnally Kimcee@coach-source.com

John Koriath jjc@fullc.com

Available now at Amazon.com, BN.com, BKConnection.com and executivecoaching4results.com.