

Make the Right Call: Executive Coaching or Transition Coaching?

Many executives are familiar with executive coaching, and some already receive guidance and feedback from an executive coach to help further their careers. But mention transition coaching, and many executives are at a loss for words. What is transition coaching? How is it different from executive coaching? Who needs which type and when?

Competition within and between organizations, shrinking talent pools and disruptive behavioral problems have all paved the way for executive coaching. Savvy organizations understand that the development of high-potentials and the continuous development of current executives' leadership skills are critical to company-wide success. Companies have long used executive coaches to build and leverage the strengths of leaders at all levels while helping them navigate obstacles and avoid failures. On the organizational level, executive coaches help companies avoid costly management turnover, develop their most talented people and ensure that leaders perform at their maximum potential.

While executive coaching is typically seen as an ongoing relationship with no set time frame or definitive ending point, it's not uncommon for the relationship to begin when an organization seeks the aid of an executive coach for a leader who needs remedial intervention. For example, the leader may have poor communication skills and is unintentionally undermining direct reports, which can lead to a loss of morale and retention issues. In corrective situations, the executive coach begins by completing a full diagnosis of the situation. The coach will help the executive see the need for change through the identification of undesirable behaviors, such as berating or blaming others, and demonstrate the consequences of these behaviors for the individual, as well as the organization. The coach then helps the executive identify practical ways, including readings for discussion and role-play simulations, to strengthen his leadership impact, provides direct and objective feedback, and ensures the executive gets back on track and stays on track.

Whether the relationship starts with a derailment situation or as part of a corporate-wide initiative, executive coaching covers a wide range of situations with one common goal: the personal development of a leader through the support of a professional relationship. Transition coaching encompasses this goal, but focuses on a specific niche—the newly appointed leader. Leadership transitions are among the most challenging and difficult situations executives face. For example, a leader might enter a new position thinking she already has all of the answers or, just the opposite, the leader might lack a clear understanding of the role's expectations. The goal of transition coaching is to reduce the time it takes for new leaders to make a net contribution to the organization and establish a framework for ongoing success.

Unlike executive coaching, transition coaching is time-bound and short-term. Many newly placed executives fail within their first two years in the position for reasons ranging from their inability to adjust to a new culture and develop strong relationships to a lack of understanding of the business imperatives. What new leaders do during their first months in a new role greatly determines the extent of their success for the next several years. Since an unsuccessful transition can negatively impact an organization through poor financial results, decreased employee morale and costly turnovers, rather than to follow the sink-or-swim approach, organizations can improve the process with transition coaching.

If organizations use the right transition strategies when on-boarding leaders, including the utilization of a transition coach, they will not only help prevent failure, but also create additional value by accelerating the new leader's effectiveness. Transition coaching uses a proven process to engage the new leader in the company's corporate strategy and culture to accelerate productivity. Transition coaching has three overall

goals: to accelerate the transition process by providing just-in-time advice and counsel, to prevent mistakes that may harm the business and the leader's career, and to assist the leader in developing and implementing a targeted, actionable transition plan that delivers business results.

While many of the issues covered by transition coaching are similar to those included in executive coaching, such as sorting through short- and long-term goals, and managing relationships with higher-ups as well as team members, transition coaching is very focused and designed to educate and challenge new leaders. The new leader and transition coach work together to develop a transition plan, a road map that will define critical actions that must take place during the first 120 days to establish credibility, secure early wins and position the leader and team for long-term success. The transition coaching relationship also includes regular meetings with the new leader as well as ongoing feedback. Frequently, the coach conducts a "pulse check" of the key players, including the boss, direct reports, peers and other stakeholders, after six to eight weeks to gather early impressions so that the new leader can make a course correction if needed.

The entire transition coaching process provides new leaders with the guidance to take charge of the new situation, get the information they need to properly set high expectations for the future, and achieve alignment with the team, as well as the larger organization, to move the business forward. Organizations make a significant investment when they recruit and hire new leaders, and they have much to lose if a new hire does not succeed, possibly several times the hire's base compensation.

Whether an executive is moving into a new position or looking to get back on the road to success, executive and transition coaching work to bring out the best in people through the support of a professional relationship. Both relationships are built on a foundation of trust and confidentiality. The ability of coaches to provide leaders with an outside resource that can also act as a sounding board helps them become the successful leaders they were meant to be. Coaching is about action and results, and that benefits the individual as well as the overall organization.

Traditional Executive Coaching Versus Transition Coaching	
Traditional Executive Coaching	Transition Coaching
Varied methodologies, philosophies and standards. Each coach likely uses different processes.	A structured methodology based on research and a systematic approach that has been tested and results in an accelerated transition.
Typically begins with some diagnosis (360-degree feedback, discussion with boss, interviews with peers, team, etc.). Often reveals specific problems to remedy.	Begins when an executive is about to transition into a new critical leadership position.
Language may or may not be tied to that being promoted in the culture.	There is a common language that can be leveraged in the organization.
Leadership model and frameworks vary by coach. Process varies by coach from "telling" to non-directive.	Coaches provide a consistent model and process.
Often reactive and occurs after a problem has been identified.	Is proactive and aims to anticipate and address common traps before they occur.
Typically takes place over an unlimited time frame.	Is time-bound: 3 to 6 months.
May be focused on the problems of an individual, as well as leadership.	Consistently places an emphasis on both organizational and individual issues and the overall strategic business issues as a starting point.
Focused on personal awareness, insights and behavioral change.	Focused on transition planning and action.
Tools and techniques vary by coach.	Coach makes use of common transition framework and tools.

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