

A Manager's Guide to Executive Coaching



BY DAN MCCARTHY Updated November 15, 2019

At some point in your career as a manager, you may have an opportunity to consider hiring an executive coach. This high-level coaching can provide a great opportunity for development, but it might not be familiar to you. Here are 10 things to know about executive coaching.

What Executive Coaching Is

An executive coach is a qualified professional that works with individuals (usually executives, but often [high-potential employees](#)) to help them gain self-awareness, clarify goals, achieve their development objectives, unlock their potential, and act as a sounding board. They are not consultants or therapists (although many have consulting or therapist backgrounds) and usually refrain from giving advice or solving their clients' problems. Instead, they ask questions to help executives clarify and solve their own problems.

What Executive Coaches Do

Executive coaches provide a confidential and supportive sounding board for their clients. They ask questions, challenge assumptions, help achieve clarity, provide resources, and yes, sometimes, with permission, provide advice. They often administer and help interpret 360-degree and behavioral assessments, conduct confidential interviews to help a client gain self-awareness, and establish [development](#) goals.

What It Takes to Become an Executive Coach

Unfortunately, (or perhaps, fortunately, if you are interested in being a coach), becoming a coach doesn't require much. Just about any retired executive, consultant, ex-HR or training practitioner, or therapist can call themselves an executive coach. There is no formal or required certification, although many have turned to the International Coach Federation (ICF) to become certified.

Who Hires Executive Coaches

Companies used to hire executive coaches to come in and fix broken executives. Nowadays, most companies hire executive coaches as a way to invest in their top executives and high potentials. It's no longer a stigma to have a coach; it's a status symbol.

While executives can hire their own coaches (usually CEOs or business owners), it's more common for companies (often the human resources department) to recommend a coach to an executive as a part of an executive development program. The pupil could be newly promoted (transition coaching), be facing a number of challenges (usually involving employee relationships), or getting groomed for larger roles. And yes, coaches are still hired to correct behavioral problems and help leaders resolve interpersonal conflicts.

What the Typical Coaching Process Looks Like

While there are many variations, executive coaching usually involves a series of phases, starting with intake, assessment, goal setting, and [development planning](#). It then progresses through the development plan with periodic check-ins with the executive's manager. The process is over when the development goals are achieved, or when the coach or pupil decides that it should stop. The typical duration of a coaching engagement is seven to 12 months.

The Confidentiality of Executive Coaching

Conversations between a coach and their pupil are completely confidential. If an organization is paying for the coaching services, they may receive periodic status updates (dates, milestones achieved, etc.), but nothing else is shared without the participant's permission.

Where Executive Coaching Happens

Face-to-face is ideal, given that so much of communication is non-verbal and face time helps in building rapport initially. It's becoming more common to coach virtually over the phone or video chat.

How Much Executive Coaching Costs

Coaching is a \$3 billion-per-year industry worldwide, and, as the Harvard Business Review estimated, the median rate for an executive coach is \$500 an hour. Many coaches will charge for a six- or 12-month engagement, but some will work on an hourly basis.

When Not to Hire an Executive Coach

An executive or manager should not hire a coach if:

- They don't believe they need coaching, are not interested in feedback, and don't believe they need to change (or don't want to).
- They are looking for business advice or consulting, i.e., someone to solve their problem for them.
- Executive coaching is only a last-ditch "Hail Mary"— a token attempt to fix a failing executive who is already on their way out the door.
- The executive is not at the appropriate level in the organization to justify the expense of coaching.
- The executive's manager should be working with the executive (coaching should not be simply a way to outsource [challenges](#)).

Where to Find an Executive Coach

There are many ways to find an executive coach. Your own company may already work with a number of trusted coaches. Executive recruitment or outplacement firms often provide coaching services or work on a referral basis with independent executive coaches.

Word-of-mouth referrals from other executives can be a source—in fact, many of the most successful coaches don't even advertise. When selecting an executive coach, chemistry is important, so it's best to interview a few to find the right fit. There are also several resources for locating an executive coach, including:

- [The Center for Creative Leadership](#)
- [The International Coach Federation \(ICF\)](#)
- [The Coaches Training Institute \(CTI\)](#)
- [Right Management](#)
- [The Marshall Goldsmith Coaching Network](#)

If your organization makes coaching available to managers, it's definitely worth your while to give it a try. It may help you develop your managerial skills in ways you never thought possible.