

# Finding the Right Guide

*Using the support of coaches and trusted advisors can reap huge benefits, but they must be chosen carefully.* **BY SARAH LEVITT**

**W**hen it comes to coaching, organizations generally fall into two categories: those that use it for remedial circumstances and those that use it to actively invest in the development of their best people.

There are many reasons why remedial coaching isn't a good bet. For example, there's the likelihood that it will be viewed as punishment rather than a high value benefit.

It's far better to focus on your best and your brightest, the leaders with the greatest potential. Develop those people, and there will be a giant ripple-out effect from that investment. Your pond will be stocked with top leadership talent. Your bench will be built from the inside. Teams will become more cohesive, trusting and efficient – making the delivery of key projects more rapid and successful, rather than a nightmare of time and money.

Talent retention and magnetization will become significantly easier. Making the investment in coaching can truly accelerate performance, success and trajectory.

At this point, you may be saying to yourself, "Hey! What about me? I could use that sort of help too." For leaders in upper levels of management, there are two different kinds of people whose services can be called upon: coaches and trusted advisors.

If you're a CEO or division president, you likely need a trusted advisor – a sounding board, confidante and devil's advocate. The phrase "lonely at the top" might describe you. The pressures you face may be tremendous, and you may have few, if any, safe places where you can share them. You can't talk to your senior leadership team or board, really. The

burdens you carry can become heavy.

People who match that description need someone who understands the rigors of business and the demands of life, who can share best practices, break down the natural isolation that comes with the role and who solely has your success as their interest.

On the other hand, you likely would benefit from an executive coach if you're a senior executive who's slated for succession or is preparing for an elevated leadership role. You need to hit the ground running in your new role with clear objectives. A coach can help you set strategic priorities,

and if it's not there, it will be difficult to get where you want to go.

Look for business experience in addition to coaching expertise. This becomes increasingly important the more senior an executive is in an organization – if for no other reason than to have a shared understanding of some of the challenges and pressures that you face.

The coach should have experience working at your leadership level. Find out what they helped their clients achieve. Do they want to establish objectives for the coaching engagement with you?

Will the coach tell you the truth and challenge you to reach your highest potential with compassion? This is an art and it should not be underestimated, both in its importance and its skill.

Finally, find out if the coach believes they're still learning themselves. Are they trying to get ever better at what they do so they can bring that back to their clients? Admittedly, this may be hard to discern.

Use coaching or a trusted advisor to set the bar even higher for yourself and your team members across the organization. When you do, you'll demonstrate that everyone, including you, is still learning and stretching.

The return on investment can be significant for an organization if it's used well. Great leaders yield great results.



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lead initiatives, influence key stakeholders, create visibility, lead a team and fully come into your own as a leader who moves with confidence across many different audiences.

Usually a coach and trusted advisor are used in succession. You might begin with executive coaching if you're new to a role, for example. After the initial engagement concludes and you've hit your performance objectives, you might transition to a trusted advisor who can give you timely input whenever you most need it.

So, how does one select an executive coach? Below are five criteria to consider:

Above all, whomever you choose should feel like a good fit, in your gut. Trust is the foundation of a good coaching relationship,