

How to Pick a Coach

Twelve tips can help you discern which leadership consultant will up your game to its highest potential. **BY SARAH LEVITT**

With business growth comes an imperative to improve your leadership skills. Not only will that help you meet new challenges and mitigate risks, but you'll greet a new level of success with greater influence. It will help you focus more time on strategic priorities. And as you become increasingly more visible, inside and outside your organization, it will enhance your confidence and executive presence.

That's why, as we emerge with great velocity, I'm seeing an uptick in the demand for executive coaching. If you're looking for an executive coach, consider the following 12 criteria:

1 The most important thing is to find someone who resonates, who feels like they're the person you want in your corner. Yes, you might discover them on the first attempt, and wonderful if you do. But if you don't, keep looking. I can't emphasize this enough.

2 Results, results, results. That's number two. Whomever you hire should have a track record. What track record? Whatever it is that you're aspiring to achieve. You're in a new, elevated role? They should know that terrain and its pitfalls like the back of their hand. Do you need to build a rock-star team that delivers so you can get out of the weeds? They've worked that. You want to enhance your executive brand and have far greater influence? They have the map. You get the idea.

3 They should also work in your space. I don't mean your industry; I mean the executive world. There are real pressures and a rigor to senior executive leadership, and your coach should understand that.

4 This should go without saying, but say it, I will: your executive coach should pay attention. To you. To what's important to

you – your goals, what you want. To you as a human being and a whole person. Cramming their agenda down your throat, by the way, is a sign that they're not seasoned.

5 That's different from challenging you with skill and compassion. A good coach should do this so that you get what you want. You should feel like you're getting better as a result, not diminished by it.

6 They should invite you to push back. I always tell clients that they know themselves best, and if I've got it wrong, if I'm



barking up the wrong tree, push back. That's what a partnership is. I count on them to speak up if something doesn't fit. It's helpful to us both.

7 In that spirit of partnership, it should feel like your coach is rooting for you, that they're genuinely supportive of your aspirations, that they want your success, that they have your back.

8 One of the first questions I ask prospective clients is: "Can you get where you want to go by continuing to do things the way you have in the past?" If they can, they likely don't need my services. If they can't, we identify specific goals and objectives for the engagement. We determine what success

looks like and how they (and their organization) will measure it.

9 An executive coach should be knowledgeable about the business world. The significance of time, revenue and results – and the impact of your work in that context – is a big deal. It's the ballgame, really. Ideally, your coach blends business acumen/experience with the human performance side of coaching and can toggle comfortably between them. The higher one is in an organization, the more important this becomes.

10 A prospective coach should be more than happy to give you a few references, people you can speak with about the experience of partnering with them. I once had a CEO who asked to have these conversations the day before Christmas, and my clients couldn't have been more willing to oblige.

11 An executive coach should customize an engagement to you, rather than asking you to fit into a template. This means taking the time up front to understand who you are and what you want to achieve. It also means being able to quickly create a roadmap for your success.

12 While it's not a requirement, it is a bonus when a coach makes relevant introductions to others in their network. Whenever I get the sense that two people should know one another, I connect them. And I love doing it.

Although all these criteria should be considered, the first is the foundation. Start there.



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