

The Challenge of Finding High-Quality Business Coaches

There is currently easy access to entrance into the market of business coaching making it possible for anyone to “hang up a sign” and call themselves a business coach. With a relatively easy point of entry, low start-up costs, and a marketplace paying top fees for business coaches, anyone with a little savvy and a corporate demeanour can pull the wool over a company that doesn’t know what background and experience to look for in a business coach. This results in wasted money, frustration, and stories about “bad coaches” that taint those who have the experience and qualifications to legitimately call themselves business coaches.

Business coaching is a newly expanding profession, and was relatively unknown before the 1980’s. There are no studies that show what makes a good business coach or what standards should be met for effective coaching. Many “coaches” have had little or no coach training or relevant business experience. Therefore, there are some principles that can be followed to assure that quality coaches can be found when the need arises within an organization.

There is a growing need for business coaches, with good reason. Change management is constant; business is moving faster than ever; and there is more global competition than any other time in history. Executives and their organizations have realized the benefits of maximizing human capital, and the paradigm of “lead or get out of the way” means that leadership – with all of its facets – is essential and needed now and for the future. Leadership development supports the growth of leaders. Business coaching provides individual, personalized, and customized support for that growth.

Business Coaching is different from other types of coaching – such as life planning, career counselling or wellness advice. Business coaches work within the framework of a unique business or corporate culture to help leaders produce business results for their organizations. The unique dynamics of a corporate culture require a unique approach and background of the coaches who are contracted to coach their individuals and teams. There are literally hundreds of coaches out there – but a select few have the background, experience, credentials and professionalism required to coach leaders and teams in a corporate setting.

For those who are looking to contract to bring coaches into their organization, it’s a “buyer-beware” situation; and many do not know where to look for good coaches or what to ask for in coach credentials. This has resulted in some horror stories of “coaches gone bad”, with money lost and credibility for the business coaching profession and process questioned. Additionally, because high-quality business coaches are in demand, their capacity to take on new or additional clients is limited. This tends to keep pricing high for good business coaches with appropriate backgrounds.

Even many large coaching organizations that represent the profession and subcontract coaches to organizations cannot adequately discern what is important in terms of coach credentials. Some require a hefty fee from the coach to be part of their referral network and are willing to take anyone who pays the fee. The large numbers of individuals involved in these organizations must be sifted through using some sort of selection criteria, then interviewed and selected using some criteria or guidelines. In order to stack the deck toward finding quality coaches, one of the best methods to find good coaches is to utilize

good-old-fashioned referral networks along with descriptions for the specific criteria or characteristics needed in the coaches. This can be time-consuming and costly, but in the end will yield the best results.

What to Look For:

- Coach-specific training: Has the coach had training in a recognised coach-specific process and skill set? How much?
- Experience in giving feedback on 360° or other assessments: Has the coach had training and/or experience in providing feedback and developing action plans around the assessments that will be used?
- Business/corporate experience: Does the coach have specific business or corporate experience and/or background? Have they coached individuals in an organization similar to yours in size, complexity, or products/services offered?
- Coach credentials and/or base number of accrued coaching hours: How long has the coach been coaching? How many accrued coaching hours has the coach had?
- Willingness to subscribe to ICF Code of Ethics: Does the coach subscribe to an ethical code? If not, would they be willing to sign a contract that includes subscribing to the ICF Code of Ethics?
- Willingness to sign a contract for services: Is the coach willing to sign a contract or agreement (with all of its organizational specifics) for the coaching?
- Availability/capacity to take on new clients: How much space does the coach have in his/her schedule to take on the number of new clients you need coached?
- There may be other organizational or culture specific criteria that are important as well, but these specifics provide a beginning to a screening process for finding the executive coaches that meet your organizational needs.

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