

# Coaching: Is It Seen As An Opportunity Or A Threat? It Is All In How It Is Framed.

By Maureen McGuire, Ph.D. & Pru Kaufman

*Executive coaching can be variably considered as the last step before dismissal, an investment in human capital, or as a development opportunity. Whether coaching is seen by an employee as a threat or opportunity is crucially influenced by how an employer frames and contextualizes that message. This article will provide guidance on how to appropriately position the coaching proposal, as well as suggestions for making the coachee's development plan an action-oriented one in which s/he is encouraged to become an agile learner who grows in value to himself, to peers, and to the organization, and who is perceived as promotable.*

Executive coaching can be variably considered *as the last step before dismissal, an investment in human capital, or as a development opportunity*. Whether coaching is seen by an employee as a threat or opportunity is really influenced by how an employer frames and contextualizes that message. Clarity about the process must happen from the start.

Executive coaching is an invaluable tool in leadership development, assessment, promotion and on boarding. Our landscape is marked by job attrition, changes in positions as the result of mergers and acquisitions which intensifies the need for employees to be working at their peak. If your company is in the enviable position of hiring any of the highly qualified applicants who are now applying to you for positions, you may use coaching as an on boarding plan to get new hires up to speed.

Executive coaching can be the tool which can fine tune an employee's performance. How they receive the message that they will be coached and how the coaching plan is executed can make a marked difference in the results.

Oftentimes the need for an executive coach is identified in one part of the company where a supervisor sees the need for an employee to be coached. The supervisor turns to the HR department to locate an internal or external organizational development coach. This disconnect can begin the fracture of the message about why the person is receiving coaching and how the plan will evolve. If the coaching plan is not well coordinated between the supervisor, the coachee and the HR contact with the executive coach, the chances are that there will not be a clear plan with objectives outlined, follow up included, and the

manner in which the coaching delivered is defined. Certain steps taken in advance can improve the coaching experience, making it more profitable both for the company and the coachee.

***Tips for Optimizing Coaching:***

- *Identify the need*
- *Address key issues like confidentiality immediately*
- *“Promote” the benefits of being coached*
- *Help the associate convert the learning to action with a Development Plan*
- *Measure change*

**Identifying the need.** A supervisor and/or HR contact may decide there is a need for coaching or sometimes an associate might ask to be coached. The initial step to be accomplished at this point is to work together to determine what is needed. Coaching can be used to:

- develop an emerging leader who needs broader opportunities or a way to identify their strengths and opportunities,
- on-board a new employee who must get up to speed quickly,
- help the associate with deficits in their performance.

What is the situation in this particular case? How will the message that: “you can be coached” best be heard?

**Tell the truth.** Be clear about why someone is being coached and what is expected from the experience. Is coaching an opportunity or is the associate having a serious performance deficit which requires a coach?

**Frame the coaching to improve the outcome.** This is an opportunity for the HR department to help the supervisor frame the opportunity for the coachee. Each coachee has heard a story about coaching. Sometimes they have heard glowing stories of the coaching experience. Even then framing their coaching is important.

However, in some organizations coaching has been offered mostly as a last chance attempt to correct longstanding performance issues with an associate. In an organization where this is the case, the offer to be coached can feel like a sentence.

In most organizations, some people who have been coached have left, and that may have nothing to do with the connection to being coached. Other times they have heard of people being terminated who have been coached. The fear that they could be in trouble

needs to be addressed. A frank conversation of the person's situation must happen. Encouraging the manager to raise the question and address the concern is important. The person's frame of mind about the experience influences how much they will enjoy and embrace the opportunity to be assisted by an experienced guide.

You and/or your manager know that coaching is an investment in an employee you want to stay and prosper. You should sell the benefits to prime the learner.

**Sell the benefits.** New employees who have been coached as a part of the on boarding experience know there is a plan. They can learn where to get their questions answered and what is expected of them in this new culture. They also learn that the company cares to see them succeed and feel more engaged. Thus the program can **become part of the path to career success.**

Several Fortune 500 companies have "fast track" associates who have experienced coaching within their leadership program, present the "lessons learned" to senior management. They can then benefit from that exposure.

An associate who has a customized coaching plan creates a development plan. Specifically identifying what the

manager and organization expects or sees helps them improve their advancement opportunities and their current performance.

Where the OD department is actively involved in next steps, they can mediate to help the coachee locate where they can use their skills in the workplace.

For anyone, coaching can help a person become aware of their natural tendencies and how these tendencies influence their everyday decisions. Coaching can help people make better decisions off automatic pilot.

**Amplify the experience.** Most OD departments are aware of others who have been coached and benefited from the experience. If these associates are willing, they can answer questions from the coachee about what to expect. A well placed former coachee can accelerate the comfort of the coachee with the experience.

Ideally, they may connect and provide networking opportunities for each other. Several companies including, J&J, are implementing peer counseling pilot programs to help associates be mentored after their initial organizational coaching development ends.

**Address the confidentiality issue at the start.** Anyone being

coached will wonder how information about the process will be stored and who will see it.

If coaching is just a developmental opportunity, most companies will release the reports only to the person coached.

At times with skills building that may require more managerial intervention, written reports are shared by the person coached with his/her manager and at times with HR. If respondents on surveys know that HR or the coachees' manager is included, the responses are more circumspect.

**The Development Plan, Where Coaching Leads to Action.** While specifics of coaching conversations are not shared, development plans created should be shared at least with the manager and at times with the internal OD representative. Most coaches will encourage the Coached to avail themselves of the opportunities that an OD representative can find for them, as well as help them to identify continuing education resources.

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Maureen McGuire, Ph.D. is the President of McGuire Consulting Services Inc. She has been an executive coach to Fortune 500 for two decades specializing in leadership development supported by assessments. She was an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Oregon Health Sciences University.  
Pru Kaufman