

Got Game?

Coaches Aren't Just for Sports



Sanya Strawser

“Coaching is about helping people have a chance to succeed. There is no more awesome responsibility than that. One of the greatest honors a person can have is being called Coach.” – Lou Holtz

Very well said.

Even though the concept of coaching in the business world has been around for over four decades, it is often unclear and misunderstood. In fact, more than one executive has been put off of coaching because of a perception that it looks too much like seeing a therapist.

Since greater definitional clarity contributes to efficacy, let's discuss it.

Imagine a scenario where you are an executive and, most days, you spend all of your time solving problems for your employees and the business. At the end of the day, you find it difficult to unwind. When you do this day in and day out, it all starts to become muddled and before you know it, the feeling of being overwhelmed takes over, which leads to a sense of redundancy, boredom, stress and burnout.

You are able to discuss your innermost, personal thoughts without fear of judgement – and able to convert them into productive ideas. This process prevents burnout, keeps you excited and inspired to set your strategies and move forward together with your employees.

Dipping a little on the medical side of things – according to a study by Schulz et al. (1998), chronic stress releases too much cortisol in the body. Cortisol is a stress hormone that can (if present in excessive amounts) wreak havoc on the body by interfering with learning, memory, immune function, bone density, weight gain, blood pressure, cholesterol, heart disease – the list goes on.

Chronic stress and elevated cortisol levels also increase one's risk for depression, mental illness and lower life expectancy.

Coaching support

Now imagine a scenario where you are an executive who is supported by an executive coach. You still spend all day solving problems for employees and the business. At the end of the day, however, you get to reflect on your day with a confidant who listens without judgment and helps unlock your leadership potential.

This expert is trained to inspire you to create healthy solutions and processes that guide you through your workdays. You are able to discuss your innermost, personal thoughts without fear of judgment – and able to convert them into productive ideas. This process prevents burnout, keeps you excited and inspired to set your strategies and move forward together with your employees.

According to a study by Bharwaney et al. (2007), executive coaching represents one method of helping individuals to increase their drive, their personal performance and their organizational productivity.

From an organizational standpoint, coaching can be a game-changing proposition.

As individual executives begin to engage in conversations with an executive coach, it could accelerate the fulfillment of personal and organizational goals, resulting in satisfied and driven executives. Another great way to ensure collaboration and camaraderie among executives is group coaching. This is a coach-led session where trust plays a significant role.

Related but not the same

So, now that we have discussed coaching, let's talk about some other related concepts like mentorship, therapy and counseling. Often it is assumed that they are synonymous with coaching, but they each have their own identity, definition and purpose.

Mentorship achieves its goals primarily by listening with empathy, sharing experiences, developing insight through reflection and encouraging the mentee to take action toward the achievement of self-driven goals. A mentor-mentee relationship is usually informal and typically functions in a reactive capacity, responding to issues or questions as they arise for the mentee.

Psychotherapy or therapy primarily focuses on healing the past. It is a professional relationship between a person and their therapist, devoted to their well-being and psychological healing via talking. Exploring personal topics in life such as anger, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, marriage and relationship challenges, parenting problems, school difficulties, career changes etc. may be the goal.

Also referred to as counseling, it helps with relieving emotional pain, reducing symptoms, improving relationships or changing behavior or lifestyle – all of which may be parts of that goal.

In a study by Gyllensten & Palmer (2007), the importance of professional coaching has been acknowledged from psychology research, commentators on the industry and management perspectives. Structured or supported coaching and mentoring within organizations is evolving rapidly and research continues to provide valuable insights into effective practices.

Many executives feel the pressure to do it all themselves. They feel lonely at the top of the organization and do the best they can every day. The good news is that there is support available. Are you ready?

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