



Executive Coaching: A Team-based Approach

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Conequity Resources, LLC, founded in 1997, provides strategic planning and leadership development resources to for-profit and non-profits organizations. Having worked with leadership teams in over twenty countries, Conequity Resources, LLC applies in-depth experience, knowledge and understanding to the process of creating extraordinary places to work. The Leadership Project is the culmination of years of experience in building high performance executive teams. Team-based Executive Coaching™ is a unique approach to building effective leadership teams.

Executive Coaching: A Team-based Approach

Leadership is exciting, whether in business or in sports. No one on the team has more to gain, or lose, than the leader. For example, within 24 hours of the conclusion of the 2005-2006 NFL regular season, five head coaches were “shown the door.” Why were these coaches fired? In every case, their firing can be traced to unsatisfactory team performance.

Mike Sherman, one of the most highly respected coaches in the NFL, was released from his duties as head coach of the 4-12 Green Bay Packers. Clearly, the team did not meet expectations. However, one of the greatest stories of the 2005-2006 NFL season has been the individual performance of Packers running back, Samkon Gado. Gado, a Nigerian by birth, began the season as the scout team running back. Because of injuries to other players, he was placed on the active roster and by mid-year became the starter, rushing for 582 yards -an incredible personal accomplishment for a player who wasn't in uniform at the start of the season. Sherman was not rewarded for coaching Gado to this outstanding individual performance. Instead, he was evaluated on the basis of team performance. Individual performance cannot compensate for poor team performance. Team-based Executive Coaching™ is a developmental process that

improves individual performance for the purpose of producing sustainable team results.

The Growing Popularity of Executive Coaching

Executive coaching has become wildly popular in the past few years. Thousands of executives have hired, or been assigned, coaches to help them improve their skills and effectiveness. The results have often been beneficial to individuals, but the debate continues with regard to the impact of executive coaching on the overall performance of the company.

By estimate, there will be more than 50,000 Executive Coaches in the U.S. by 2007. Harvard Business Review recently reported that an estimated \$1 billion dollars will be spent on executive coaching this year. In most cases, the measurement of the effectiveness of executive coaching is the performance of the individual. Every coach can claim success if he or she is able to point to the performance of selected individuals. How much better would it be if executive coaching were evaluated from the perspective of the performance of the team? The necessary evolution of executive coaching is toward a team-based approach. In a team-based approach, the benefits

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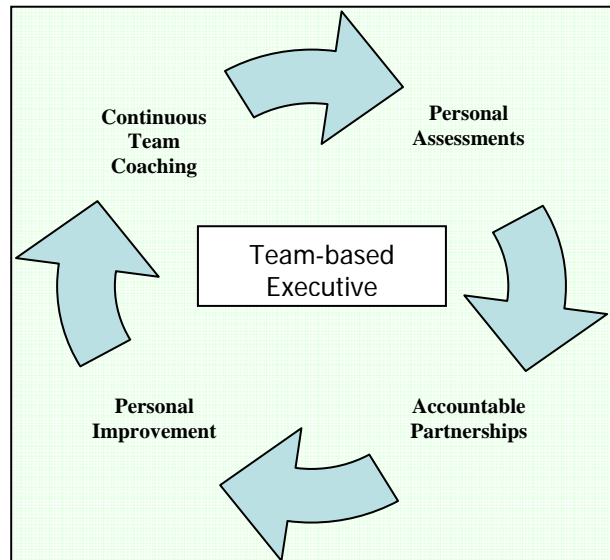
of traditional executive coaching are combined with those of improved business results and the development of a culture that reinforces effective leadership throughout the organization. In a November 2004 **HBR** article, “*The Wild West of Executive Coaching*,” Stratford Sherman and Alyssa Freas observed that “no one has yet demonstrated conclusively what makes an executive coach qualified or what makes one approach to executive coaching better than another.” The lack of standards means it is very difficult for a company to evaluate the success of an executive coaching program, much less measure its impact on overall company performance. In our research, the most common measurement of success is whether or not the participating executive “felt good” about the results – not a very scientific process for determining the value of such an investment in the future of corporate leadership.

What is Executive Coaching?

Executive coaching consists of a series of structured interactions between a coach and an executive for the purpose of improved personal performance leading to improved business results. A coach can help an executive make better decisions, improve work/life balance, develop strengths and address weaknesses. The coach provides a formal process for the executive to evaluate his or her skills and abilities and build a plan for personal improvement. However, the accountability that is established between the coach and the executive brings the greatest value to the relationship. When the coach is able to hold the executive accountable for their goals and

objectives, then the likelihood of a successful outcome is dramatically increased.

Some organizations utilize executive coaching simply as a reward rather than as a strategy to significantly improve individual or team results. Jay MacDonald at BankRate.com noted that executive coaching is being used by firms like Cisco and Google to reward star employees. “Companies find that hiring an executive coach for a rising star might be the coolest new perk they can offer.”



Clearly, there is a demand for and benefit from executive coaching. A recent survey conducted by Executive Development Associates in which 56% of respondents indicated a plan to increase their use of external executive coaches demonstrates a growing popularity. This popularity is based in part on financial results. A 2001 MetrixGlobal study of one Fortune 500 company indicated that executive coaching had returned \$5 for every \$1 invested, a 529% ROI. Executive coaching can be an effective way to reward and maximize the



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impact of star performers. This benefit is best appreciated when coaching is implemented in a team-based approach. Paul Michelman, editor of the Harvard Management Update, writes that executive coaching is best utilized as “an integrated part of a larger leadership development program” (**Harvard Management Update**, Vol. 9, No. 12, December 2004). Clearly, a company will realize greater gains by creating an environment in which executive coaching is part of an overall plan to significantly increase leadership capability throughout the company. Team-based coaching benefits everyone.

Defining Team-based Executive Coaching™

In Team-Based Executive Coaching™, the focus is on overall business improvement, not just individual improvement. Executives are given the opportunity to be coached, but they also are expected to coach others. Self-improvement is a lofty goal, but investing in the performance of others is the critical contribution a leader makes. Coaching and teaching others is a powerful motivation for change as an executive works to improve their own leadership effectiveness.

The executive coach builds positive accountability among the participating executives. Partners are assigned to provide internal encouragement, accountability, corporate and personal knowledge, and a long-term view of corporate values and culture. After an initial phase focused on personal improvement, then the executives are asked to

begin the process of coaching others within the organization.

Ultimately, the external coach becomes unnecessary as a culture evolves where performance improvement and business success are natural and sustainable results of a network of coaching relationships.

The Benefits of Individual Coaching

Coaches, in the context of highly individualistic sports like golf or gymnastics, can achieve a significant level of celebrity – Bela Karolyi (gymnastics) and David Leadbetter (golf) are two immediately recognizable examples. Individual coaching can be very effective when a person works alone or needs to improve dramatically in a specific skill set. For example, an independent salesperson or consultant may greatly benefit from an individual coach who can help with personal performance. When someone works alone, the accountability found in an outside coach can be very valuable. But in a business context where individual results are insignificant if they do not contribute to team wins, the value of individual coaching decreases. A team-based approach keeps the team, and team performance, central in the coaching picture.

The Benefits of the Team-based Approach

Where do we go from here? How can we harness the momentum of executive coaching for sustainable, extraordinary business results? The basic answer lies in creating a leadership culture that supports sustainable personal *and* organizational improvement. A team-based approach is essential to maximizing the rewards promised by individual executive coaching. This is true for a number of reasons.



1. Team-based Executive Coaching™ is three dimensional. Two dimensional coaching is limited to the relationship between the coach and the executive. Team-based executive coaching is a triangular relationship between the team, the executive and the coach. Three dimensional, team-based coaching locates this relationship in the context of leadership effectiveness and business results providing the objective feedback of an external perspective in the context of real business challenges. Team-based Executive Coaching™ is evaluated on the basis of team performance. Individual performance isn't lost in this approach, but the ultimate evaluation of effectiveness is based on the ability of the team to achieve sustainable, predictable business results.
2. Team-based Executive Coaching™ constructs a favorable cultural environment within the organization to reinforce leadership development. Individually-focused coaching can sometimes be hindered by organizational noise – competing priorities, competing values, etc. A team-based approach insures that the coaching process will be integrated with organizational priorities and values.
3. Team-based Executive Coaching™ allows the team to be the hero, not the just the coach or the participant. In this approach, the team is recognized for collective results and organizational wins. The coach works to enable the success of the individuals as well as the team.
4. Team-based Executive Coaching™ builds skills and capabilities that are essential to effective leadership – coaching and mentoring direct reports. As executives take on the responsibility of growing the leadership capabilities of their team, they will become much more effective than if they experience the benefits of coaching in isolation.
5. Team-based Executive Coaching™ builds accountability throughout the organization. Everyone learns the importance of accountability to one another – not just the traditional view of bosses holding their employees accountable through compensation or the threat of firing.
6. Team-based Executive Coaching™ has a permanent impact on the organizational culture. Ultimately, the organization recognizes the importance of creating a work place where accountability and coaching are a way of life.

Enabling Team Success

NFL coaches and corporate CEOs alike are fired each year as a consequence of poor team performance. And, nothing exceeds the

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satisfaction of a coach or an executive than when their team achieves extraordinary results – people with diverse talents and skills working together to reach the pinnacle of success. Whether in sports, in music or in business, when groups of people perform well together, the whole is worth far more than the sum of the parts. When people work together and set their sights on team performance, rather than individual accolades, they can achieve previously unimagined levels of success.

Team-based Executive Coaching™ provides more than just individual performance improvement. It puts the focus on growing people throughout the organization. When a team-based approach is successfully implemented, the entire team is equipped to achieve extraordinary, sustainable results.