

Selecting the Right Coach

Coaching is the new professional development tool for the business owner. The feature article in the May-June 2005 issue of *The Business Owner* introduced coaching and discussed the three main types:

Personal or Life Coach: A person who assists or mentors you in reaching your personal, life and/or career goals.

Executive or Professional Coach: A person who is hired by an organization to mentor the development of an employee for the benefit of the organization.

Group Coach: A person hired to work with a group, such as an executive team or family, to improve team performance.

The success of any coaching relationship depends on the skill and experience of the coach; the “fit” between coach and client; the up-front agreement on inputs, responsibilities and outcomes; and the level of buy-in of the coach and client(s).

Do you need a coach?

Coaching sounds pretty cool, but you need to ask yourself, “What is it that I want to accomplish? Sample clear answers might include the following:

“I want to become a better business owner and manager ... the ultimate goal being an accelerated learning curve and revenue and profit growth.” (personal or professional coach)

“My team and I need to develop better skills for working together to improve our ability to manage a growing, profitable business.” (group coach)

“I want to improve my interpersonal and leadership skills.” (personal coach)

A clear, written purpose will help you assess whether or not coaching is an option for assistance in goal attainment. It will also help coaching candidates evaluate “fit”.

Finding coach candidates

Coaching has exploded in popularity in the past decade. Since there are no rules for who may call themselves a coach, and there are no generally accepted standards for certification, finding a good coach can be difficult.

There are, however, some ways in which a coach may demonstrate commitment to the profession. First, how long has he or she been coaching? Can he or she produce references? Is coaching his or her full time job? Does he or she offer a brochure describing services? Does he or she have a Web site? Has he or she published articles or books?

Second, there are several coaching accreditation programs, such as those issued by the International Coaching Federation (www.coachfederation.org); the College of Executive Coaching (www.ExecutiveCoachCollege.com) and Corporate Coach U (www.ccu.com). Does your candidate have any training or certifications in coaching?

Third, what is the professional background of your coaching candidate? If you own a business and want mentoring as a means for investing in your success, you might want a coach who has business ownership or leadership experience.

To find candidates, visit the above-mentioned Web sites. Also, ask your friends and peers if they know any good coaches.

Assessing “Fit”

Credentials are one thing, but fit is another issue altogether. Fit speaks more to chemistry. Do you get along? Does he or she respect you? Does he or she understand and support your goals? Does he or she listen to you deeply? Does she have her own agenda, or does she adopt your agenda? Is she smart? Is she wise, patient, structured, committed?

We agree with the *Harvard Business Review* which recently said:

“Perhaps the most important coaching qualifications are character and insight, distilled as much from personal experience as from formal training. Pay close attention to chemistry and match”

Maybe the right coach is like the right spouse? If you have to think about it too much, maybe it's not right. In short, you'll know when you meet the right one.

Up-Front Agreements

The key to any relationship is ... expectations. If all parties are honest and up-front about desires, expectations, capabilities and responsibilities, it's tough to get too far off track. So, up-front communication is critical. Extended discussions should be undertaken at the outset. Then, mutually agreed-upon goals and responsibilities should be established in writing, along with a plan for meeting frequency, agenda and accountability.

As a business owner once said, “Everybody has an agenda. Whom can I trust?” Such may be the greatest endorsement for a coach — a person specifically hired to be candid,

honest, and have YOUR best interest in mind. As you interview coaching candidates, be sure you find one who will tell it like it is. □

This is the second article in a series on Coaching.

May-June 2005 issue: *Executive Coach: Nonsense or Dollars and Cents?*

> This issue: *Selecting the Right Coach*

Sept-Oct 2005 issue: *Getting the Most for Your Coaching Dollar*

Nov-Dec 2005 issue: *Group Coaching*

Jan-Feb 2006 issue: *Business Owner as Coach*

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