

# What Does an Executive Coach Do?

by R. Dale Lefever, Executive Coach

It has been my privilege to serve as an executive coach to senior leaders. These individuals, both men and women, have occupied important positions in their organizations and all have expressed a commitment to excel in their leadership roles. Here are some things they have taught me about this important relationship:

1. The purpose of this coaching relationship is to help the person excel in their present position and not to advance their career.
2. The client is the individual and not the organization in which they work. While the hope is the wisdom the client develops will advance the work of the organization, a coach is not a consultant to the organization.
3. It is important to develop a “safe place to have a dangerous conversation.” This means, especially from the coach’s perspective, all conversations are private and confidential. The coach confides in no one else inside or outside the institution.
4. There is nothing remedial in the engagement. All executives can benefit from an experienced and committed coach, especially if they have not held previous senior level positions. The theme is growth and personal success.
5. The primary intent of the coaching engagement is the development of the leader’s skills in decision-making as this person’s decisions affect many inside and outside the organization.
6. The areas where most clients desire clarity and growth are in self-awareness (i.e., my strengths and limitations); self-management (i.e., my ability to manage my time and the important relationships in my life); and self-efficacy (i.e., setting realistic expectations for myself and knowing when to complement my strengths with the strengths of others).
7. Continuity in the coaching relationship is important. This is achieved by setting times for regular discussions, preferably over at least 12 months, to complete meaningful conversations. In this process, it is critical for the client to set the agenda, in advance, and for the coach to provide the client timely written reflections on each conversation.
8. Goals, agreed to by the coach and client, are important for accountability and to monitor progress in the areas identified by the client as being the most important. A coaching session is not a “cathartic chat.” It is a conversation between two professionals equally committed to helping the client achieve success in their present role.
9. At the client’s request, others can be invited to provide feedback on the client’s current performance (i.e., baseline data) and summative feedback at a time mutually agreed to in the future. The client would work with the coach to design the feedback instrument, process and contact those invited to participate.
10. A coach is someone who knows the client well enough to tell them the “truth,” cares enough about them to do it and is independent enough to survive it!

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