

The CEO, the Executive and the Coach

Many Chief Executive Officers have a direct report that just “needs to change a little”. That little change often refers to a behavioral issue that the CEO clearly sees but is unsure how, or hesitant to address, with their subordinate executive. Oftentimes that executive’s behavioral issue is related to decision making, knowing when to be assertive and when to wait.

Did you ever wonder why that subordinate executive is less assertive or venturesome than desired? Did it ever occur to you that perhaps you, the CEO, could be part of the problem? Or from a positive viewpoint, part of the solution!

So often when an organizational CEO finally makes the decision to engage an executive coach, the onus is placed solely on the shoulders of their subordinate. There is often scant accountability for the CEO prior to the engagement, and far too often, very little accountability after engaging a leadership coach. The CEO merely approves the task and assumes minimal responsibility for the eventual outcome of a coaching engagement.

Sage advice is for the CEO to sit back and do some serious reflection and introspection before engaging an executive coach. Reflection should consider the circumstances that brought the CEO to determine a coach is needed. What factors and issues are really driving your executive? Secondly, introspection. What have you, the CEO, done or not done that has impacted this executive who needs a coach? These are key questions.

We’re now just beginning to look at the ramifications of change and seeing that it just might be you! That’s the topic for discussion in this article. Just what has the CEO omitted or committed that led us to this juncture?

Reflecting on my years as a CEO of two hospitals and now in my fifth year as a leadership coach, I have yet to have a client organization where the boss didn’t also need some level of “concomitant coaching”. You read that right. When senior executives need coaching, the boss is all too often part of the problem. Fortunately, those enlightened CEOs can be part of the solution.

Just how can a CEO become part of the solution? I suggest three tenets be followed. First, spend some time mulling over that reflection and introspection concept. Take a good hard look at you, your actions and your outcomes. Are you really as ‘hands-off’ as you say? Are you really interested in the long term growth of your subordinates? How about in their profession, not just in your organization?

Secondly, what strengths does that executive have that the CEO hasn’t permitted to develop to their fullest? Have you sat down with them and talked about their ambitions and concerns? Have you been open to listening, really listening, to their desires and ideas? Is there a written plan of development that includes negotiated performance metrics?

Finally, when is the last time you, as CEO, really thought about your own career? I mean really assessed your strengths and weaknesses? Who are the executive complements to you so that

your weaknesses are minimized and your strengths maximized? Have you given enough thought to relinquishing some current duties so that your associates can grow even further? Where is your written plan of development that includes performance metrics?

Now we have come full circle. An executive coach may be needed for one or more of your leaders. But, who tells the CEO that they are part and parcel of the engagement?

We can all learn with the formula of acknowledgement, observation, change and evaluation. Every expectation should have commitment with consequences. Personal accountability is paramount.

The most successful CEOs get out of their comfort zone. They seek true, meaningful outcomes with no denial. Of course they have fears, but they accept accountability and don't spread the blame. They take ownership for what happens with their executives. The buck not only stops with them, it starts with them!

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