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Corporate Preachers

Frustrating helplessness is an adjective that best describes the state of managers in today's fiercely competitive corporate world. The feeling may not be a permanent feature of managerial work, but it is definitely a regular one. Most managers can relate to this state and can quote more than one instance where they felt helpless and frustrated. The picture that we see today may look eternally pessimistic. For, more managers are moving in and out of jobs at a rate that is best described as "alarming." Mounting work pressures, unreasonable deadlines and personal setbacks are some of the commonly stated reasons for managerial stress and frustration.

The impact of these man-made "obstacles" can hardly be ignored since it affects both managerial and organizational performance. Organizations are thus increasingly seeking ways to overcome the hurdles. One of the most popular and effective ways has been executive coaching. Calling for external help in the form of executive coaches has worked well. The coaches would enable managers to deal with the workplace challenges and also equip them with better skills. Organizations are investing both time and money in coaching their managers.

The sole responsibility of managers focuses on getting the best out of their subordinates. Thus it's important that they keep themselves updated and well-equipped with skills and knowledge.

Enter the coach

Hiring executive coaches to assist managers in honing skills and making them better leaders is only one aspect of coaching. The other and most critical aspect deals with the attitudinal change to be brought in the way managers perceive coaching. Most managers put up strong resistance when they get detailed for training or coaching through an executive coach. The general perception about training being the salvage of "underperformers" still haunts the corporate psyche. Hence there is a need for a culture conducive to the success of executive coaching. It is critical to create a culture that rewards managers on performing well in training and spreading awareness about coaching.

Having set the stage for executive coaches to demonstrate their prowess, it's important for organizations to time their entry correctly. Bringing in an executive coach at a time when it's least required will yield little or no benefits. Hence timing the process is critical. Training specialists believe that there are four indicators of the right time. These are:

1. When managers themselves believe they would perform better under guidance and assistance of an experienced hand.
2. When managers are looking for newer and more challenging work.
3. When the responsibilities and the job description are either stepped up or altered

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4. When managers' skills begin to look redundant and obsolete.

The reasons for hiring a coach largely indicate the fact that coaching is about change. It is most needed when managers want to change their approach to management in certain ways. This change could be in the skills set, knowledge base, leadership style, or competencies. Continuously upgrading these personal assets with the assistance of an executive coach is thus a justifiable training alternative.

The coach ought to...

While inducting an executive coach, organizations should carefully craft a mandate specifying expectations of the organization from the executive coach. Having a pre-determined mandate ensures deliverance of desired outcomes and minimizes the risk of failure. Every organization has its own set of "do's" and "don'ts." However, there are certain basic pre-requisites that have to be met before getting into an executive coaching arrangement. These include:

Organizational Awareness

Executive coaches should update themselves about work environment, culture, values and guiding philosophies of their assigned organization. In addition, knowledge about business requirements and industry trends is critical in framing training strategy of the executive coach. For instance, innovations like delegating authority and empowering employees may not work if the organizational culture does not support them. This could happen when an organization follows the bureaucratic model of management. Hence, altering training strategies on the basis of business and organizational requirements is critical to the success of executive coaching.

Relationship Management

Executive coaches are professional allies of managers. Nevertheless, they need to impart a personal touch to the entire process of executive coaching. Creating a healthy and open relationship between the coach and the manager is vital for the success of executive coaching. A coach should therefore be more of a friend and confidante than an uptight senior who merely guides the manager.

Sensitive and Understanding

Executive coaching is a confidential process. This does not mean that people in the organization are oblivious to the fact that there is an executive coach working on their manager or colleague. Confidentiality in executive coaching is relevant to the events that unfold in the process, especially performance-related issues. The coach should thus be sensitive to the repercussions of letting out information about managerial performance or personal shortcomings.

Analyze and Act

Executive coaches should be patient in drawing conclusions. Jumping the gun without weighing a situation can complicate matters. Coaches should therefore analyze managerial behavior and the situation keenly before churning out a solution. For instance,



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if a manager has problems with delegation, then the coach should first delve into the reasons for his behavior. After analyzing the apprehensions and fears of the manager regarding delegation, the coach should focus on resolving them.

Executive coaching is a tool that managers can use to their advantage. Today, when competition is keen, competent and potential managers are increasingly seeking ways to minimize the threats to their own prospects. Executive coaching has thus come in at the right time. Hence, opting for executive coaching is an indication of a manager's potential and not his underperformance.