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Your Next Training Investment: Leadership Coaching

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Each year, as organizations look at training budgets, leaders want to get the most out of every training dollar. They ask questions like, “What new skills do we want developed? Which conference should our staff attend? How do we manage travel and time away from the office?” But the time has come for organizations to start challenging traditional training programs and engage in something more impactful, more personal. Some organizations have found a solution that is tailored to an associate’s individual goals, strengths and learning style.

As 59% of HR professionals plan to put more emphasis on succession planning and people readiness, many companies are relying less on traditional classroom-based training. Instead, they are blending in leadership coaching to create a strong personal impact that is aligned with their organizational mission and people strategy.

What is Leadership Coaching?

The International Coach Federation (ICF) defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.” The process can help a participant dramatically improve their outlook on work and life, while improving their leadership skills and unlocking their potential.

The Findley leadership coaching model helps individuals align their behaviors with personal aspirations, life philosophy and motives. Organizations benefit from improved individual performance and career path alignment. Participants clarify their personal and career goals, which can increase job satisfaction, career longevity and overall engagement. The model is designed to achieve sustained, desired change by coaching with compassion and mindfulness. Our coaching model requires commitment from both the participant and the employer. It is that commitment combined with the level of support needed, which drives each individual’s personalized timeline. Throughout the coaching experience, the focus remains on sustainability.

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Leadership Coaching Model: Coaching for Sustained Desired Change

With our leadership coaching model, we help individuals align their behaviors with their personal aspirations, life philosophy and motives. Organizations see benefits through improved individual performance and career path alignment. The model is designed to achieve sustained, desired change by coaching with compassion and mindfulness. It requires commitment and the timeline is based on the level of support for the change. All coaching sessions are confidential though the individual may be asked to share his or her learning agenda with trusted advisors at the organization. Throughout the coaching experience, the focus will remain on sustainability.

“Our noble purpose in life, our dreams and images of a desired future, our passion, our calling...It is supported by our belief that we can actually have an impact on our lives and the world around us.”

McKea, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008. Becoming a Resonant Leader, Harvard Business School Press, p. 72



Based on Intentional Change Theory as researched by the faculty of Case Western Reserve University.

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Why Engage a Coach?

As the demand for high-caliber leadership talent continues to grow, companies are cultivating managers who can respond to the ongoing challenges of globalization, new generations of workers and rapid advances in technology. Plus, failures in leaders can be costly. According to a widely cited study by the Center for Creative Leadership, nearly 40 percent of new chief executives fail outright within their first 18 months on the job and even more chief executives fail to live up to the expectations of those who hired them. One of the ways that organizations are trying to support their new leaders is by engaging a coach early in the process to guide the leaders through the first phases of their new role.

The Harvard Business Review (HBR) conducted a survey of 140 leading coaches to understand the current state of the field. This study revealed that coaches are no longer most often hired to usher toxic leaders out the door. Rather, the top three reasons are:

1. To develop high potentials (48%)
2. To act as a sounding board for leaders (26%)
3. To address derailing behavior (12%)

Keys to Coaching Success

If you are considering engaging a coach for your leaders or high potentials, here are some key questions to ask yourself.

Question	Considerations
Is the leader motivated to change?	Participants who get the most out of coaching have an intense desire to learn and grow.
Is there a strong commitment from the organization to develop leaders?	The organization must have a true desire to retain and develop the coached leader.
Does the leader have good chemistry with the coach?	It's easier to learn from someone you trust. Coaches must build trust and everyone must be patient as the relationship develops.
What are your goals for the coaching engagement?	It is worthwhile to identify your goals in order to find the best coach for your needs. Coaches can serve many roles for leaders including a sounding board for tough decisions or to create accountability for learning goals.
What feedback will the organization receive?	Confidentiality must exist between the coach and your employee. However, everyone must determine what feedback the organization will be receiving to understand how to measure progress. For example, a coach might be required to share a learning plan or developmental goals with the employee's supervisor.

As you evaluate a coach, you will also want to understand what tools will be used to help the leader or high potential determine his or her path. The HBR survey indicated that 61% of organizations look for coaches that have a clear methodology. Though different coaches value different methodologies – ranging from using 360-degree feedback to relying on psychological feedback – it’s important that the coach explains exactly what process he or she uses and what outcomes can be expected.

How Coaching Differs from Training

Coaches and trainers approach learning differently. A trainer controls both the content and the process for learning. The success of training programs depends on both the competence of the trainer and the capability of the employee to absorb and implement the new information.

Coaching, on the other hand, is driven by the participant. The coach asks questions to get the participant to explore new concepts. Many times, the participant is considering information that they already know, but in a way that would probably not occur to them without the guidance of a coach. Although the coach controls the overall process, the leader or high potential determines the learning points and the content of the sessions.

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Another difference is that training is usually done in groups while coaching must always be done one-on-one. Many organizations are exploring how to maximize their training budgets by using the two learning experiences together. For example, leaders or high potentials might have difficulty applying new skills that they learn in a training class to the workplace and coaches can provide the individual support to transfer that knowledge into day-to-day work decisions. Or coaches can teach participants about the coaching

process and review some exercises and instructions in a group format prior to the one-on-one sessions. This group work can create a strong support system for all the participants engaging in the coaching process at an organization.

The Results of Leadership Coaching

One of the challenges in leadership coaching is the difficulty of measuring results. There is currently little research that has followed coached leaders over long periods. Most of the evidence around effectiveness remains anecdotal with the positive stories outweighing the negative ones. The International Coach Federation continues to survey leaders and organizations who engage in the coaching process, and have found that 85% of adult clients who had a coaching relationship reported being satisfied with the experience .

As an organization considers coaches for its current leaders or high potentials, it’s important that the objectives are clearly defined at the beginning of the process. The organization can then measure the effectiveness of the coaching initiative based on achieving these goals. The coach will be responsible for helping the leader or high potential set meaningful goals and identify specific behaviors or steps for meeting them. The coach will also clarify milestones or measures of success and hold the employee accountable for them.

What kind of measurements can be used? An organization should consider both internal indicators of success and external measures of performance. Internal measures can include 360 degree assessment results, changes in the individual’s self-awareness and awareness of others, observable shifts in creating efficient action, and inspiration of the coached participant’s group. Examples of external indicators include increased income or sales revenue, obtaining a promotion, improved performance feedback from customers, or other business performance data (that is readily available and influenced by the participant).

How to Engage a Coach

Working with a coach requires a commitment of time and energy from the organization and from the participant. The first step is making sure the leader or high potential wants to be coached. Leaders or high potentials who embrace coaching are more transparent in addressing their strengths, weaknesses and goals. The organization will also have a financial commitment. Fees charged vary by specialty and by the level of experience of the coach. Organizations should consider both the desired benefits as well as the anticipated length of time to be spent in coaching. Since the coaching relationship requires trust and clear communication, any questions or concerns about fees and timing should be discussed in initial conversations before the agreement is made.

Look to organizational advisors that you trust and have a good reputation for delivering service. By selecting the right coach for your organization, you can add tremendous value to your learning and development initiatives – making the next generation of leaders ready and committed to their path.

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