

**So, You Think You Need a Coach?**  
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Current ATD members may also view it online:

<https://www.td.org/magazines/ctdo-magazine/so-you-think-you-need-a-coach>

You've probably heard of executive coaching. Maybe you've considered working with a coach, or your boss/HR/others suggested you benefit from coaching. You may even be considering a coach for one of your direct reports. But how do you make the most of this powerful (though not inexpensive) growth opportunity?

By various estimates, 55-80% of American Fortune 500 companies now use executive coaches, and growth in this industry has been rapid for the past 20 years. The vast majority of coaching assignments today are reserved for high potential, high performing leaders. Gone are the early days of assigning a coach to someone as a "last-ditch effort" prior to dismissing them. If your company has recommended you for coaching, congratulations! They must view you as worth the investment.

While much training requires missed work time, often using hypothetical classroom examples (with little after-class follow up), executive coaching is conducted on-the-job, in a highly-personalized / real-time environment (with built in accountability over time). Research is increasingly proving that coaching works.

Here are some suggestions for you to make the most of executive coaching:

**1. Are you ready to do the work?**

When a CHRO calls us looking for a coach for an executive, our #1 question is: "Is this person motivated to change?" What about yourself? If yes, read on. If no, skip to #5 below.

**2. A Coach – for What?**

There are countless types of coaches for countless reasons: i.e. building leadership skills, assisting with a key career transition, improving public speaking, discovering a new career path, enhancing "executive presence" or improving one's personal life.

What exactly do you seek to improve? Or what do others say you need to improve? (Don't know? Your coach will interview others to figure that out.) Executive coaching highly effective for a vast list of leadership topics, such as: enhanced communication skills, inspiring others, treating people better, holding others accountable, managing up, making tough decisions, transitioning positions or just gaining more self-insight.

Coaching is *not* effective for areas such as fixing integrity problems, learning functional content, or improving those who just aren't motivated to change. Also, coaching is not designed for advice-giving, i.e. an expert who offers advice on how to run your company - that would be a consultant.

### **3. Source Candidates**

Different types of coaches focus on different areas. Typically, C-level executives are looking for an "executive coach" as opposed to a "life coach", "career coach", or other type of coach. Coaching is nearly always paid for by their company, instead of out of one's personal pocket. Oftentimes, one's HR, executive/leadership/organization development functions may have already-established relationships with coaches for you to meet. If not, coaching firms can learn about your specific need(s) and then recommend coaches for you to interview. The International Coach Federation also offers a coach finder search tool on their website.

Our research on executives' top preferences in coaches includes: "ability to build rapport" (does one feel safe and trusting of this coach?), "business experience" (can this coach understand my work context?), "skills/experience as a coach" (is this coach a good coach?) and "area of specialty" (does this coach specialize in the area I'm trying to improve?). Other lesser-important attributes can include a coach's location, prior experience with your company's culture or industry, an official coaching certification and/or advanced degree.

It is not necessary for your coach to have actually *done* your job in the past. In fact, a recent former-executive-turned-coach may not actually have the deep expertise and training in coaching skills that a longtime professional coach will possess.

### **4. Chemistry is Key**

We always provide executives with 3-4 personalized coach recommendations, and then request they interview all of them. If the coach is local, leaders should bring them in for a live chat (decent executive coaches live in most major business cities worldwide at this point).

For the interview, you can ask practical questions surrounding their background, years of experience coaching, specific coach training and methodology. Other insightful questions to ask may include:

- "What would you consider your 'sweet spot' specialty in coaching – what area(s) do you specialize in particularly?"
- "I'd like to work on such-and-so. Tell me about coaching assignments you've worked on with similar development objectives?"
- "Tell me about other leaders you've worked with in similar C-suite positions to mine – what were they working on, and how did it go?"

And despite you asking questions, a good coach may actually turn the conversation around to asking *you* questions about your development goals. Sometimes the dialogue turns into an impromptu coaching session – a great way to get a feel of how they work!

Executives we've met often point to the chemistry as being one of the most important criteria in a successful engagement. You need to feel safe and comfortable with your coach, yet you also want to feel like they challenge you and keep you growing. While most coaches you'll interview have the skills to do a fine job, ultimately you may end up choosing based on your own gut feel.

### **5. Do the Work – Or Save the Money**

I worked with a COO not long ago who liked the idea of *having a coach* more than actually *doing the work* with a coach. Coaching is now seen as a status symbol, and this leader wanted to brag about having a coach, yet cancelled countless meetings, never did the homework and ended things early.

Research by Marshall Goldsmith and others repeatedly show that the executive's effort is the single greatest predictor to successful coaching outcomes. 94% executive coaches in our recent research cite lack of leader commitment as the largest reason they will not take a particular assignment.

Coaching takes openness, time and discomfort in an effort to achieve greater change. Most coaches will want to be in touch with you every 1-3 weeks (for 30-120 minutes at a time), with various assignments for you to complete in between. Meetings with your manager, HR and other key stakeholders are often part of the process too. There is real work involved, and the more you get out of it is directly related to what you put into it.

But, the results can be career changing, career saving, and even life altering. 95% of the executives in our research said they would hire a coach again. One executive told us "I would say if you have coaching done well, it can change your life, and your life as a business leader." Imagine the possibilities!

Key Links:

Request a Coach – CoachSource  
[www.coachsource.com/intake](http://www.coachsource.com/intake)

Blog entry on selecting a coach: "I want a coach who has done my exact job before – but bigger!"  
<https://coachsource.com/drupal7/2015/05/08/i-want-coach-who-has-done-my-exact-job---bigger>

International Coach Federation coach finder  
<https://coachfederation.org/find-a-coach>