

# Demand your money's worth

Executive coaching has run amok — but it doesn't have to

If there ever were a faddish management tool, coaching would be it. It seems like executive coaches are everywhere in large organizations — to the point where it appears everyone is working with an executive coach, is an executive coach or is thinking about becoming one.



**STEVE JACOBS**

Chairman and senior partner

CLG Inc. is a business management consultancy that advises executives on how to achieve new performance, culture change and lasting competitive advantage through the principles of applied behavioral science.

Steve is the lead author of "The Behavior Breakthrough — Leading Your Organization to a New Competitive Advantage."

[sjacobs@clg.com](mailto:sjacobs@clg.com)  
[www.behaviorbreakthrough.com](http://www.behaviorbreakthrough.com)  
[www.clg.com](http://www.clg.com)

Nevertheless, most organizations that use executive coaches haven't seen dramatic improvements in business performance. Individuals still fail to meet their potential, and the same stumbling blocks to leadership growth and development remain.

## Beware of whom you hire

If we take a closer look, it's not that there's too much executive coaching; rather, too little good coaching is taking place.

In many organizations, coaching has run amok. A dozen (and often many more) independent coaches work within a single organization. These professionals employ no common approaches or tools, and in some cases, no apparent meaningful tracking of progress.

In addition, their activities usually don't align to organizational and talent strategy.

Executives who wish to enhance their leadership skills should be careful in selecting coaches. Beware of coaches who don't have a track record of delivering a measurable business impact.

Look for a coach with whom you have a clear chemistry or rapport, who can incorporate applied behavioral elements to changing behavior. After all, new performance requires new leader behavior — it's that simple (and that difficult).

Finally, check in with yourself to make sure you're genuinely committed to changing your behavior. If not, it might be better to skip coaching for now.

## Get your money's worth

Those responsible for leadership and executive development in organizations must rein in coaching if it is to serve a useful purpose.

As a chief human resource officer or head of global development, demand more from your coaches. Request that they provide a staged and gated coaching process to ensure clear achievement of successive milestones. Require, too, that they track and report progress (across multiple coaching clients, when appropriate) without violating confidentiality.

Ask them to inform you proactively when coaching isn't the best development option, even if a leader requests it.

And insist that they tailor coaching objectives to company strategy, distinct leadership pipeline requirements and individual executives' unique challenges.

## Don't lose faith

Skilled coaching remains vital for executives seeking to get better at what they do. It's considered essential in nearly every other field of high performance, except business leadership.

In a recent study, nearly 100 percent of CEOs reported they enjoyed receiving executive coaching and leadership advice. One reason may be that they realize they need help.

Most of us have blind spots that hold us back and cannot be fixed in the absence of external feedback. Left to their own devices, most leaders, even high potential fast trackers, overlook key aspects of their development that they later regret.

So, don't lose faith in coaching. Instead, change how you select and work with professional coaches. Coaching has indeed run amok, but the good news is, it doesn't have to. ●



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