

## Optimizing in an Executive Coaching Program

*“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” John F. Kennedy*

Executive coaching can be a game-changing process for a senior leader. Coaching can deliver truly transformative experiences and catalyze higher degrees of focus, clarity, engagement, performance and results for the motivated executive.

Often isolated and peer-less, and operating in idiosyncratic and complex business environments, senior executives crave the type of challenge, feedback, empathy and support that a dedicated and personalized Executive Coaching process can provide.

While Executive Coaching is a powerful and potent way of accelerating leadership and career development it also demands a significant investment of time, money, energy and engagement from the executive. It is imperative that the executive sees a return on this investment, that they optimize in the Executive Coaching process.

Optimizing in an Executive Coaching program is an intentional and continuous act by both coach and coachee – this primer aims to help senior leaders get the most from the experience.

### The Optimizing in an Executive Coaching Program Primer

- **Select the Right Coach**
  - Selecting the right coach for you is part art and part science. Coaches should present with the right mix of credentials, career profile and competencies – they have genuine experience and empathy for and with your current role and career aspirations. Chemistry is critically important and after meeting the prospective coach you should feel content, inspired, excited and perhaps a little scared (“I will get the straight scoop and the stretch mandate”). A good rule of thumb is to select the coach who exhibits the skills, behaviors and presence you crave or one who has done what you want to do.
- **Set Your Mindset and Find “Priority” in the Coaching Process**
  - “Time” and “Energy” are the most critical but scarce commodities that a senior leader has, it easy to be consumed by the fires consuming the corner office. To optimize in the Executive Coaching process, leaders must set the right mindset and priority-set for the program. Coaching becomes an integral part of your “executive” life and you must look at your calendar in new ways, unless you prioritize the coaching program and believe in its value the experience will pass you by.
- **Set SMART, Measurable and Observable Goals for the Program**
  - The old adage goes, “what gets written, gets delivered.” Executive Coaching programs are by their nature both focused and fluid/flexible. It is not uncommon for a coaching assignment to start off with a single skill or behavioral area (e.g., Executive Presence”) to evolve into a more fundamental analysis of the coachee’s fit with their company and/or their desire for a better home-worklife balance. Sufficient time must be allocated at the start of the process to ensure that measurable goals are established for the program so that the coach and coachee have both a “clock” and a “compass” to look forward and back in ensuring that the program is hitting the mark.



- **Ensure the Coach Fully Understands Your World and World-View**
  - An exemplar coach exhibits a panoramic view of you, your world and world-view (paradigms, perspectives, points of view, vision and aspirations). It benefits both the coach and coachee when the coach locates his coaching, challenges and advise at the interface of your work and home life, the challenges of the day and the broader complexities of life. Coachees should err on the side of over-sharing with their coach – the more the coach knows the better placed he is to provide challenge, empathy, support and advise.
- **Prepare Well for Each Individual Session**
  - Before each coaching session spend 30 minutes in quiet private contemplation creating an agenda for the coaching dialogue. What are the most important leadership issues facing you at this moment? How have you fared since the last coaching session? How can you best use your time with your coach? Spend another 30 minutes quieting your mind from the frenetic pace of day-to-day organization life. Do what you need to do to get yourself ready to explore new territory, challenge your current thinking and experiment with new leadership practices.
- **Balance Vulnerability with Confidence and Humility**
  - Receiving feedback and challenge within the context of a coaching program can be confronting. That said, receiving feedback can be the most powerful catalyst for personal change. A key part of getting the most from a coaching process is the mental work that steels the coachee for feedback and challenge – that means, experimenting with the tools the coach provides and making yourself vulnerable and open, positive and resilient and capable of balancing the competing forces of confidence and humility.
- **Drive for Quantum Change**
  - If the transitions, changes and acquisitions you need to make to take your Leadership to the next level were obvious or easy you would have already made them. Be prepared to experiment with new mindsets, skills, behaviors and habits, some of which might be out of your comfort-zone. Drive for the competencies and behaviors that will help you achieve success today and tomorrow.
- **Judge the Program Against the 4 Ps – Purpose, Principles, Passion and Progress**
  - Executive Coaching is always about the future and therefore is always about the coachee's vision and sense of purpose. Visions are aspirational statements, desired future states that we yearn for. Purpose, together with our principles provide a deep sense of meaning in our lives. A great coaching program should adhere to your principles and also fire your heart and your mind. Ultimately, the coachee must see and feel progress – positive movement towards a desired future state and a better version of self.

## **Conclusion**

An Executive Coaching program is proof that you are valued and committed to your own personal and professional learning and development. It requires a big investment so therefore, should offer a big return on that investment. You, as coachee are critical to that Rol.