

Coaching for Women



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Executive Coaching Overview

Why do companies engage executive coaches?

In the past, coaches were hired to ‘fix’ problem performers. Today, coaches are typically employed to develop the capabilities of high potential performers.

Harvard Business Review¹ conducted a study about why companies hire executive coaches. The top three reasons were,

- Develop high potentials or facilitate transition (48%)
- Act as a sounding board (26%)
- Address derailing behavior (12%)

Research indicates that coaching is a worthwhile investment. Manchester Consulting Group² examined the impact of executive coaching in a study that included 100 executives, mostly from Fortune 1000 companies. *Benefits to organizations* included gains in productivity, quality, and customer service along with reductions in customer complaints and costs. *Benefits to executives* who actively participated in the experience included better working relationships across the organization, increased job satisfaction, and reduced conflict.

Coaches often serve as “thought partners” to executives seeking to accelerate their leadership skills to attain goals. While effective leaders are strategic thinkers with the ability to manage complexity, they do not accomplish goals in a vacuum. Leaders achieve results by coordinating the efforts of others. Leaders can craft the vision, set the strategy and direct efforts, but getting the work done effectively and sustainably through others requires relationship-building, communication, and people leadership skills.

Public sector principals and officers participated in a Booz Allen Hamilton’s ROI study³ to assess the business impact of coaching. Improved teamwork, increases in quality of consulting, retention, and increased team member satisfaction produced at least \$500,000 of annualized benefit to the business.

According to Booz Allen Hamilton’s calculations, the ROI of coaching was 689%. Senior leaders surveyed after the coaching experience reported intangible benefits such as,

- Improved teamwork (58%); for example, one executive was more attuned to behaviors and reactions; as a result, the team is accomplishing more and she is getting more buy-in for ideas and proposals from peers and organizational leaders.
- Team member satisfaction improvements (54%); increased productivity and retention resulted from higher team member satisfaction.
- Significant improvements in relationships with peers and team members (53%); by encouraging more open discussions, giving feedback, and mentoring others, leaders built bridges with peers and were better able to anticipate and resolve conflict.

Results like these suggest that executive coaching can help leaders increase productivity, build organizational capabilities, stay focused, meet objectives, and improve working relationships – leading to enhanced job satisfaction, less conflict and increased organizational commitment for themselves and their teams.

Why focus Executive Coaching on Women?

Gender Gaps

Coaching can accelerate development for leaders who want to advance their careers but don't know how, or who recognize that the skills that got them to their current level will not take them to the next. This benefits the executive as well as the sponsoring organization. However, there continues to be substantial divides between men and women in leadership roles. While men and women are fairly equally represented at the entry level and first-line manager roles, the gap widens as career progress. A DDI study⁴ demonstrated how a relatively nominal gap in early leadership roles can increase over time. Their 2011 survey found that 59% of first time leaders were men while 41% were women. At mid-manager and senior manager levels, however, only 27% of leaders were women.

Because coaching can identify and correct career limiting behaviors while building on strengths, coaching serve to propel careers to the C-suite. If executive coaching is an investment made at higher leadership levels, however, then more men than women are likely to be targeted for this career-enhancing opportunity. This can contribute to women getting left behind, thereby perpetuating the "glass ceiling" effect. Interestingly, research by McKinsey and Company⁵ indicates that companies with at least three or more female executives outperformed companies with no women in executive roles on a number of performance indicators, including financial performance. If having more women leaders at the top of the house enhances performance, then developing women is not just a "diversity initiative" but rather - a business imperative.

Fewer women in top leadership roles

Research⁷ (2011) focused on high-potential MBA's found that both men and women negotiated starting salaries and higher level positions at about the same rate (men, 52%; women, 47%). Gender differences appeared later, however, as these MBAs progressed in their careers. Men were significantly more likely than women to counter their first post-MBA job offer by asking for a higher salary in the next job (men, 50%; women, 31%).

While there are many possible reasons for fewer women in top leadership roles, including personal and family reasons, another cause might be that women are less likely than men to ask for what they want. In their book *Women Don't Ask*⁶ Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever cite cultural norms and values that prevent women from being more assertive on their own behalves. For example, "eight times as many men as women negotiated their starting salaries." (p. 5) Over time, small difference can grow to increasingly larger gaps, both in salary and advancement. Men have a greater propensity than women to ask for what they want, and continue negotiating higher raises and increases over their careers. As the authors write, women "ask for less when they do ask, and they usually get less, too. The net result is a huge imbalance in the distribution of resources and opportunities for men and women." (p. 9)



Jo Miller, CEO and founder of Coaching for Women, conducted extensive interviews with leaders and uncovered 12 key skills necessary for advancing in organizations. The top four⁷ are

- Exuding an aura of credibility and authority
- Making accomplishments visible, instead of working hard and hoping the work will speak for itself
- Becoming a person of influence
- Building a powerful network with key organization players

While these skills are important for men and women, women's *perceptions* about behaviors tend to differ from men's. For example, many women cringe at the notion of leveraging their relationships, negotiating for their advancement, or advertising accomplishments – all of which are essential for advancement. Coaching can help women reframe “political skills” and “influencing for success” as important to furthering the collective good rather than personal gain.

Why focus coaching efforts on women?

Whether it's due to societal messages, personal choices, or other factors, women tend to ask for what they want less frequently than men. They keep accomplishments quiet, not compete directly, and focus being likeable rather than direct and assertive – all of which can limit promotability. According to Catalyst's research (2011)⁸, making achievements known and gaining access to powerful others had the greatest impact on women's career advancement. And yet, many women avoid self-promotion and networking because they lack the necessary skills, or have negative beliefs about behaviors they associate with being too pushy, abrasive or using contacts for personal gain.

Coaching can help women learn how to assert themselves with confidence and credibility, while leveraging interpersonal skills and values to influence outcomes that benefit their teams, companies and families.

Even if women want coaching, they may accept this as a perk for leaders in pay grades above their own, rather than make a case for their own advancement. Thus, fewer women will derive the benefits of coaching, which can limit advancement to executive level positions. For that reason, **smart companies are proactive in identifying women in entry level to mid-level management roles who could accelerate as leaders through the structured, targeted supported offered by executive coaching.**

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