

# Business Coaching:

How On-boarding and  
Ongoing Coaching Can  
Make A Difference

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# A Definition

By Leta Beam and Jeffrey Zegas



**I**n recent years, many organizations have found business coaching to be one of the most effective ways of cultivating professional and personal development for teams and high-performing executive leaders. But what is the nature and scope of “business coaching?”

A business coach is a client’s “success partner,” serving as a confidential sounding board and advisor with the goal of helping the client—either an individual or organization—become more successful. While there may be some face-to-face interactions, most coaching typically takes place through regular phone conversations. Individual and team coaching occurs either on an ongoing (every week, every month, etc.) or “onboarding” (generally limited to an executive’s first 12 months in a new role) basis. Together, the coach and client choose the focus, format, and desired outcomes of their work.

A good business coach has a rich reservoir of talent, expertise, information, experience, personal networks, and resources. In sharing this toolbox, the coach helps the client broaden his or her toolbox. An effective coach, however, does not adopt a position of authority or healing. Coaching is not “telling,” directing, managing, cajoling, or browbeating. First-rate coaches operate under the premise that there is untapped potential in people, and their job is to create conditions that allow that potential to surface.

## Measurable Results

Business coaching has proven bottom-line results.

*Fast Company* magazine (April, 2006) reported that 56 percent of companies surveyed said coaching is a major learning method they emphasize in their organizations, and 51 percent said their use of coaches had increased.





According to executives and upper-level managers, 77 percent reported improved working relationships with direct reports as a result of coaching, 71 percent saw improvement with supervisors, and 63 percent enjoyed better relationships with peers. They also noted a marked increase in job satisfaction (61 percent) and in organizational commitment (*Fortune* magazine, Feb. 9, 2001).

A comprehensive study by *Manchester Review* conducted in 2001 said that the output of executives involved in coaching partnerships averaged nearly 5.7 times higher than the initial coaching investment.

Motorola's well-documented (see [www.1to1coachingschool.com](http://www.1to1coachingschool.com)) experience with coaching found that they routinely invest seven percent of payroll in coaching and that the investment has resulted in a 20 percent productivity improvement. For every dollar spent

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on coaching, Motorola reaps a return of \$29 in incremental revenues.

*Harvard Business Review* ("The Wild West of Executive Coaching", Nov. 2004) says about coaching, "... we have not seen a company that can't benefit from more candor, less denial, richer communication, conscious development of talent, and disciplined leaders who show compassion for people."

This article describes how business coaching can serve as both a stellar on-boarding tool for individuals and teams and an effective, ongoing resource for executives and the teams and organizations they lead.

### Coaching the Individual: On-Boarding

Business coaching is of particular value at key transition points. Most organizations understand the need to invest significant time and money in identifying and attracting top-notch executive talent, and many retain executive search firms for this purpose. Far fewer organizations address the follow-up question: Once a new executive is on board, what will the organization do to ensure his or her success, especially during the critical first three to six to 12 months?

"A startling number of American employers fail to successfully support and integrate new executives they've recruited from the outside," says Joseph Daniel McCool, the former long-time editor of *Executive Recruiter News*. McCool, now a New Hampshire-based consultant who is writing a book about executive recruiting best practices, adds, "Executive on-boarding is a 'must-have' corporate insurance policy for every single executive search engagement. The risks are too high simply to assume that every new executive is going to effectively transition into their new operating environment."

Business coaching, he adds, is an effective tool in enhancing a new executive's ability to manage priorities and build important stakeholder relationships during this critical transition period.

On-board coaching of an individual:

- Helps the new executive adapt his or her leadership style to a new organizational culture
- May prevent the new executive from acting too soon – sometimes with negative results – before integrating themselves into the culture
- Encourages an immediate investment in building relationships with key stakeholders
- Offers a secure and confidential space for the new executive to work through the isolation that frequently accompanies transition to a new company
- Identifies potential pitfalls early so that the new executive can self-correct any potentially harmful behavior patterns or perspectives

- Provides the new executive a confidential forum for resolving personal or family issues (especially important when relocation is required)
- Facilitates “quick wins” that accelerate the executive’s assimilation and eventual long-term contribution to organizational performance.

A good example is a situation where a community hospital replaces its CEO who retires after a long tenure. Consciously or unconsciously, the long-time CEO developed a culture, a way of doing things at the hospital and of relating with physicians and the community. While the new CEO is probably hired to affect certain strategic and/or cultural changes over time, he or she must simultaneously fit into the existing culture

to avoid a complete “palace revolt.” A coach may be of particular value when the new CEO is a physician with little business training or organizational leadership experience.

#### Coaching the Individual: Ongoing

When used as an ongoing tool intended to produce professional mastery, business coaching adds value in different ways. It can:

- Help executives more accurately read the organizational tea leaves to avoid misjudging dynamics and expectations
- Accelerate the development of “deep smarts,” where the executive truly gets to know people and their abilities, understands where the organization is and how it got there, and identifies what’s working and what’s not quite right yet
- Stimulate the executive’s personal and professional growth
- Help executives “see around corners” and anticipate next moves quickly
- Focus the executive on building a strong “bench” by creating leaders at all levels of the organization through talent planning
- Offer the ideal space to define (and continuously redefine) success, develop inspired actions, assess, review, celebrate, and make mid-course corrections.

A good example is a vice president of Patient Care Services using executive coaching as a tool to learn how to manage the change process in a large healthcare system more effectively. Coaching offers the executive a safe place to think out loud about important decisions, stay focused on personal and professional mastery objectives, and get an objective viewpoint on challenging situations—all with the goal of modeling desired leadership behavior.

#### Coaching the Team: On-Boarding

While working one-on-one with a new executive is the most powerful way to assure a long-term fit, it is not the only contribution that business coaching offers during times of leadership transition. Team coaching can also yield significant positive results when a new leader comes on board by affecting the performance of a management team during the integration period. This type of coaching can:

- Facilitate effective team communication, especially active listening



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- Reduce the fear (of the unknown) factor often associated with the arrival of a new leader
- Foster trust between existing team members and the new executive at an accelerated rate
- Open a team to sparks of possibility created by fresh leadership thinking
- Portray change through the lens of opportunity rather than threat
- Facilitate a team's commitment to contributing to the new executive's success
- Encourage honest and open communication to remove potential barriers to positive change.

A good example is when an established team gets a new leader. Such a team has longstanding habits and patterns—both positive and negative—and must unlearn “old tricks” and open itself to fresh thinking. Coaching offers a quicker path to “we” thinking in these situations. The coach plays the role of translator, facilitator and truth teller, which is particularly important for teams that had not yet achieved high performing status prior to the new executive's arrival.

### Coaching the Team: Ongoing

Despite substantial evidence to the contrary, we still act as though simply organizing people into work teams will automatically yield success. While humans are collaborative creatures, most of us have spent our entire lives learning how not to collaborate. In business, individual achievement has been king for years and still is in many arenas. Business coaching helps teams develop a strong foundation and perform at peak levels. Team coaching is tailored to the specific needs and goals of a team but often includes one or more of these dimensions:

- Clarifying roles and creating synthesis
- Identifying, understanding, and living the team's purpose
- Meeting the current performance challenge and reaching for “stretch” goals
- Building trust, connection, and commitment
- Assuring robust, honest dialogue among members and with key constituents.

A good example of ongoing team coaching is when a team is engaged in the heavy lifting of improving collective performance, erasing silo thinking and acting, handling the exit and entrance of members with aplomb, and letting go of the past.

### Final Thoughts

Business coaching is not a magic bullet—it cannot be used to fit a round peg into a square hole. In fact, once in a while, the coaching process uncovers a poor fit for a new executive before it becomes evident. That's not a bad thing because the discovery gives both the organization and the individual an opportunity to move on. In the vast majority of cases, however, business coaching makes leadership transitions easier and more successful.

As healthcare delivery becomes more business-like, healthcare organizations and healthcare leaders are developing a different set of expectations around workplace experiences. With its role in fostering alignment, business coaching is emerging as a powerful tool in building more effective healthcare organizations. ■

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