

Professional Development

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The New Management Competency: Executive Coaching



Executive or corporate coaching, as a skill, is a promising competency for not only management consultants but also managers themselves. With the explosive growth of this consultative specialty, has come a myriad of practices, techniques, and competencies. Ultimately, this leaves the manager not knowing what techniques and competencies to focus on in order to implement coaching as a management tool.

One only has to review the professional literature to find as many descriptions for executive coaching skill sets as there are authors. With this in mind, I have weeded through hundreds of articles to formulate a competency list for supervisors and managers containing “must have” and “must use” coaching competencies.

The superior coach should possess the following technical abilities for coaching

1. The ability to set the stage by establishing ground rules, reporting lines, confidentiality, and trust,
2. The ability to assess the current situation fully and accurately,
3. The ability to achieve alignment and agreement (with the employee and key stakeholders) around critical needs and achievable objectives,
4. The ability to develop and execute an approach that will lead to a successful outcome,
5. The ability to recognize emerging problems and opportunities in advance and adjust the plan of action accordingly, and
6. The ability to provide follow-up with the employee, to whatever degree necessary, to ensure sustainability.

Through experience and background, the superior coach should:

1. put the employee’s needs ahead of his or her own ego,
2. listen with nuance and sensitivity

3. establish the highest level of trust, openness, and personal connection,
4. ask provocative questions to draw information from the employee that can be used to lead the employee to new levels of performance,
5. judge actions or words to determine whether development is occurring at the appropriate rate and in the correct direction,
6. manage the coaching dynamic to the ever-shifting mood, attitude, and will of the client,
7. back away from an area or subject that is not in the employee's best interest to pursue or one that he or she is highly resistant to working on,
8. change the employee's behavior gradually, but steadily, even in the coach's absence,
9. push the employee to new levels without putting him or her in a position that would lead to compromise, embarrassment, or decrease the desire and willingness to change,
10. create an independent capability in the employee by building his or her strengths, instead of building reliance on the coach.

The suggested core competencies constitute a skill set weighted toward being a trusted and approachable coach who can establish long-lasting relationships with a variety of people throughout an organization. A collective listing of the suggested core competencies from the literature include:

1. approachability: approachable; puts others at ease; warm, pleasant, and gracious; sensitive to and patient with the interpersonal anxieties of others; builds rapport well, and is a good listener,
2. associates comfortably with top management; deals well with senior executives; understands the thinking patterns of top executives; uses business acumen and pattern language, and develops appropriate methodology,
3. compassion: genuinely cares about people; is concerned about their life issues; is available and ready to help; offers empathy when needed,
4. creativity: develops innovative and distinctive ideas; effortlessly connects problem issues with distinctive action plans,
5. employee focused: able to meet the desires of the employee, develops trusting and effective coach/employee relationships,
6. integrity and trust: trustworthy; confident; can speak the truth in a diplomatic and supportive manner,
7. intellectual horsepower: smart, intellectual, and capable; functions well in an analytical setting,
8. interpersonal savvy (relates well to people): develops rapport, actively listens, builds trusting, and respectful relationships,

9. powerful listening: uses active listening; fully hears the employee; reiterates employee's opinions despite disagreement,
10. deals with paradox: able to be fully present with the employee; uses a strong and empathetic approach when needed; self-confident yet humble,
11. political savvy: diplomatic; uses sensitivity in an organizational setting; strategically plans and thinks; identifies corporate politics as a necessary function and adapts to it,
12. self-knowledge: self identifies personal strengths and weaknesses; learns from past mistakes; accepts criticism and feedback; is not defensive.

Research has shown that the up and coming *Generation Xers* are a more “me” focused workforce than their predecessors. To flourish in today's evolving corporate and talent management environment, a supervisor or manager must not only possess the above competencies, but also become proficient in their use. Doing so will not only allow the manager to better develop and groom the up and coming workforce and decrease employee turnover as a result of increased career satisfaction, but also place the manager at the top of their corporate game.

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