



## Making the most of your executive coaching opportunity

Once you and your organisation have made the decision to partner with an executive coach I want to ensure it's a beneficial and enjoyable experience. How can you make sure you make the most of this opportunity and be confident that you will look back on this as a great time in your career?

The first thing to appreciate is that you are important. Your organisation values you and is investing in something that it believes it will benefit from. That means that your organisation will expect you to take time and invest in it too. Your organisation has invested resources and is giving you time to do this so be confident, you have their support. I would expect your experience of coaching to enhance the work you will do every day as well as produce long term benefits for you and your organisation.

Coaching is a partnership and so there a number of things you can do to enhance this. Perhaps the most important is bringing a great attitude. Whether you have experienced coaching before or not, it's quite usual to feel a little anxious. Be reassured that many of your colleagues have partnered with coaches and have grown, developed and moved on as a professional and a person having gained valuable new insights, knowledge and skills.

*"A mind is like a parachute; it works best when it is open"- Dali Lama*

Here are some hints and tips to help you make the best use of your coaching programme.

- **Commit to appointments & make time** You are undoubtedly very busy. Your programme will be time limited, typically 6 months to a year and this time will pass quickly. You and your coaching sessions are important so prioritise them in your calendar and allow for any activities or preparation work. The work we address will sometimes be difficult or challenging. It is easy in your busy world to prioritise other demands over your coaching and occasionally we can subconsciously try to avoid coaching challenges by cancelling or postponing sessions. Have confidence in yourself and the process, you will gain immensely by working through these issues. It's also true that if you feel that you are too busy or stressed for your coaching session this might be the time when you can benefit from it most. Sometimes an emergency or unanticipated event does occur that will mean a session needs to be cancelled. You can think about how you could keep your coaching commitment on track perhaps having a telephone call, meeting on skype or communicating by email.
- **Be prepared to be challenged** Sometimes coaching can feel a little uncomfortable as it is the coach's role to challenge you and help you see, hear, understand and use things in new ways. The aim of the feedback is to be constructive and it can be the first time you have experienced observations made with the sole purpose supporting your growth and development. You can make great use of this feedback to define your goals and direction. In working to discover the most useful way of processing it you can demonstrate the courage and strength of an inspirational leader who balances humility and confidence.



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- **Set clear goals** Sometimes these goals are shared and developed jointly with your organisation or line manager, more frequently this responsibility is delegated by your organisation and they are defined by you. It is important you take a view of the big picture and that you also drill down into more detail to set some priorities about what you want to achieve from the programme. It is the role of the coach to help you define and refine your goals. Usually 3 to 5 goals provide plenty to focus on. These goals will be used to plan the coaching work and allow you to track your progress. You will be impressed with how far you can travel in a coaching programme. If you have already completed tools and assessments such as 360 feedback or MBTI these can be very useful in setting goals. If not, we might consider completing these in the early stages of your programme to help you to define your priorities. Assessing your calendar and portfolio of work can also help you pinpoint areas for immediate focus.  
The coaching process is a dynamic one so it will also be important to review these goals and amend them as changes and new challenges emerge. Being able to work flexibly and find new opportunities in emerging events is a leadership skill your coaching programme can help you hone.
- **Track progress** Coaching programmes are time limited and I will be firm about our focus and commitments to sessions to help keep it on track because I want to support you to make progress. It's also one of the joys of coaching to be able to look back and appreciate how far you have come.
- **Make use of tools & resources** I have access to a range of tools and resources that we can use to help define your goals, gain new insights, learn and build new skills and confidence. If you already use or have experienced tools or techniques that you find useful please share them with me. I will often share reading or links to other resources that I think you might find useful and it would be usual for you to have activities to complete between sessions. These are often conversations with contacts and colleagues, trying out new behaviours or techniques in your day to day work or intentional observations about your work or certain situations. They are designed not to add to your already busy schedule but to enhance your awareness, choice of leadership and management styles and new opportunities in your everyday work.
- **Keep the conversation flowing** We will agree a schedule of sessions to a timetable that suits you. I want to be a real resource to you and for us to develop a successful partnership. I would not expect us to be in contact daily or even weekly but I am available between sessions to talk on the phone if needed or to receive an update or answer a query by email. You can be confident that there is someone in your corner who will provide authentic support and honest challenge. Once the programme is completed you may even want to stay in contact. It's great to hear about how you are progressing and the longer term impact that the coaching will have.