



Executive Coaching Services

17 Frequently Asked Questions

Benson & Company

EXECUTIVE COACHING - 17 Frequently asked Questions

1. What is the difference between Coaching and Executive Coaching?

Coaching is for anyone, whereas Executive Coaching is usually for senior managers at an executive level only. Executive Coaching is conducted by an external coach, which enables a deeper level of work because of the increased neutrality and confidentiality possible when working with an external coach, compared to working with an internal one.

2. Is Executive Coaching only for Executives?

Executive Coaching is usually for C-level clients (CEO, CFO, COO etc.), that is Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director level, as well as senior managers in an organisation or division. It can also be for managers aspiring to those roles.

3. What's the difference between Coaching and Mentoring?

Coaching, as understood in the professional development field, is a question based approach which by making space for focused reflection, enables deep insights and increased clarity to occur and results in powerful learning and development. To be effective the coach need not have experience of doing the coachee's job or being in the same industry. In fact, by taking a neutral and detached stance the coach's "naïve" questions can open up new thinking. On the other hand, because mentors often do have experience of your industry, organisation and/or job, they give advice and recommendations alongside using the skills and questions of the coaching process. Some say that mentoring can stifle new and creative thinking because the mentor inevitably passes on accepted wisdom and what worked for them.

4. How does Coaching help people achieve their goals?

There are many reasons why Coaching helps people achieve their goals but here are just a few. Having someone to whom you feel accountable is one reason. Having the coach's commitment to helping you achieve the goal you have chosen is another. The coaching process tends to articulate goals in great detail and this extra clarity in the objective enables you to see more clearly how to achieve it.

5. What happens if I don't know which goals I want to achieve?

Your coach will help you get clarity on the goals you want but you must start coaching with a wish to develop and change. You do not need to have pressing problems to solve but if you are totally satisfied with your current condition and have no wish to gain new insights and develop, then coaching is not likely to be useful to you.

6. Does Executive Coaching cover personal development or just professional?

Executive Coaching normally starts with professional development but usually includes some parts of personal life. For instance, many clients at this level want and need to improve their work-life balance. Another example is one of our clients who was in the midst of a sensitive personal situation and found this badly affected his ability to concentrate at work. A couple of sessions focused on how to deal with the new situation, how to make it work for his family and how it related to his work needs. When this was complete, his own energy and drive at work returned.

7. What are the differences between thinking on my own and doing it with a coach?

Perhaps some examples from our own experience will help here. When individuals work with an Executive Coach they find these benefits: *'the coach holds the space for me to complete my thinking on the topic I have chosen, whereas on my own I will bounce from idea to idea and soon be off topic'. Thinking with a friend has a similar tendency. Also, because time with the coach is limited, we are much more focused and my coach asks me more direct and useful questions than I ask myself. The coach can see, and make me see, where my thinking is flawed or has gaps.*

8. How many sessions would I need to make significant change in my leadership?

This depends. Some changes are quick but embedding them takes longer and is by no means assured, as we all know from failed New Years resolutions. With coaching, improvement in one area typically shows up the need for further improvement in connected areas. Success breeds an appetite for more success and new goals. Most Executive Coaching clients work with their coach for 12-18 months to achieve deep insights, significant learning and change, but a 6-month programme also produces useful results.

9. How many sessions per week are needed for the programme to produce results?

Our clients find a weekly conversation on the phone with their coach works very well. This is often preferred to a longer session face to face on a less frequent basis.

10. What kind of questions does the coach ask?

This is a difficult question because each coach will have their own preferred way of working. However, with an effective coach the process should always be open and honest.

There are coaches who ask questions so that they understand the coachee's thinking and base their questions on first obtaining that clarity. Another coach might ask questions with the sole aim of moving forward the coachee's thinking, and have no need to understand the context fully themselves. Another coach might ask the same question six times so that the coachee goes deeper each time. Each coach uses the questions that help the coachee most.

11. What are the topics/skills the process focuses on?

The process will focus on skills or topics chosen by the coachee. It might start with leadership, a new role, confidence or impact in speaking in a certain context, how to engage staff and mobilizes the team more effectively. In some instances the aim of the coaching will be agreed with HR or a line manager. For instance, we recently worked for 12 months with the MD of the EMEA division of a global company. The initial conversation about goals was the "chemistry meeting" with coachee and coach alone. General goals were then discussed with the coach, the coachee and his line=manager, the CEO.

12. How can my employer be sure of ROI?

We look at how to meet the coachee's objectives and how to align them with organisational objectives. For instance, when working with our Leadership Dashboard framework we examine vision and values both of the individual and of the company to see where they are aligned or unaligned and how to deal with that. Ideally, what provides ROI to the individual should also provide ROI for the organisation.

13. Do I get given tasks to do between sessions?

Useful tasks between sessions would depend on the relationship and what has been agreed between coach and coachee. Some clients have enough on their plate between sessions so our coaching tools or frameworks are used within the session only. Other clients like "homework".

14. How do I find a coach who has done my job and understands my challenges?

You may not be best served by a coach who has done your job. See 3 above. Moreover someone who has done your job finds it more difficult to refrain from giving you answers and the idea of coaching is that it is the catalyst for you to think in new ways. Thus, coaching discourages dependency, whereas consulting or mentoring can be seen to encourage it. The role of the Executive Coach is to help you solve your challenges effectively; whether they understand them completely may be irrelevant.

15. What happens when I don't do some of the tasks because of a lack of time?

Normally this would be discussed to see if there were insights to learn from the experience. For instance over-commitment might be a habit worth addressing.

16. What happens if I feel that Executive Coaching is not helping me to develop?

Your Coach will want you to keep them closely informed of results and how useful the programme is, so normally there would be regular reviews (e.g. monthly) and any necessary amendments made to keep it optimally effective. Sometimes incremental changes are not perceived by the coachee until the reviews. If the programme is not helping the coachee develop, this is probably evident to the coach too: there would be a discussion and a decision made on whether to change the approach or stop the programme.

17. Where do the sessions take place? Is it always face\to\face?

Sessions are in the client's offices, in our offices in Oxford, in a neutral location, or by phone, Skype or video conference. The majority of our clients prefer the phone because it is more focused and is very effective. Because it takes less time and eliminates travel, costs are reduced too.

10 Additional Questions You Must Ask before You Hire An EXECUTIVE COACH;

1. How does your Coaching differ from conversation with my peers inside or outside the organisation?
2. What kind of people have you coached and what was the focus and results?
3. What sort of questions would you ask someone like me?
4. Do you only coach Executives?
5. Does this Coaching cover personal development or just professional?
6. How many sessions do I need to make significant change?
7. How do you work: how often and how long are the sessions?
8. Is this coaching for me or for the organization and what kind of ROI can I expect?
9. What happens if I feel the programme is not helping me change?
10. Why do you coach executives?

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