

Is Coaching Right for You?



BY KITTIE W. WATSON, Ph.D

Most Fortune 500 companies have coaching programs for leaders who are transitioning to new roles that require new skills or capabilities. Coaches expedite the speed at which leaders and high achievers accelerate performance and adapt to new cultures and situations. At some point in a person's career, aspiring leaders will be offered and/or will request the services of a coach. When the opportunity presents itself, individuals need to ask, "Is coaching right for me?" When considering a new coaching engagement, it is important to determine:

- If you are ready to be coached
- How to select the best coach for you
- What to look for in a coach

Are you ready to be coached?

Everyone is not equally ready to engage in and benefit from the coaching experience. Before beginning a coaching engagement, determine whether or not you are ready to be coached by asking yourself some key questions:

1. Have you identified areas for your personal development?
2. Do you find it helpful to talk with people you respect about the challenges you are facing?



"A good leader inspires intense loyalty!"

3. Are you willing to ask for and listen to challenging feedback?
4. Are you open to new ways of doing things, even when you have been successful in the past?
5. Are you willing to explore things about yourself that others may perceive as inhibiting your effectiveness?
6. Are you willing to invest your personal time/energy to learn and challenge yourself to do things differently?

Answering yes to three or more of these questions suggests you are likely to benefit from working with a qualified leadership coach. Coaching is most effective when individuals understand their development needs and are willing to explore new ways of behaving and accomplishing objectives.

According to seasoned executive leadership coach Becky Ripley, "For coaching to make a difference, it is imperative that the coaching partner be willing to do things differently—in spite of previous success. If a commitment to grow and change is weak or coerced, coaching wastes organizational resources as well as the coach's time and energy."

Even though a coach will help you inventory skills, competencies and opportunities for growth, it is important for each person to conduct their own assessment. The coaching commitment is a personal choice that also requires a significant investment of emotional, intellectual and, at times, financial resources.

How to select the Best Coach

Selecting a coach with whom to engage is a very personal and critical process. Many companies vet a group of highly qualified coaches, while others are introduced through the grapevine. It is wise to give leaders a choice when selecting a coach. Without buy-in and commitment, it is easy to blame the selection process if coaching doesn't work out. While bosses can and should offer recommendations, potential partners need to have input.

While referrals are often valuable, it can be difficult to know how to choose and discriminate among different coaches and approaches. The coaching relationship works best when the coach and leader's values, talents and availability match. While building trust and commitment takes time, the ultimate key to successful coaching is trust—trust that your coach has your best interests in mind and trust in his or her competency and skills.

What to look for in a Coach

The criteria for selecting a coach often depends on the goals for the engagement, however there are some basic considerations to keep in mind. Rather than accepting the first referral that comes along, ask questions using specific criteria to assess credentials and character.

+ EXPERIENCE: What experience does the coach have? Has s/he worked with people at the level of responsibility, in the industry, in the functional area, or under the same circumstances as the coaching partner? How long has the person been a coach?

+ CREDIBILITY: Does the coach have credibility? Does s/he seem to understand and appreciate the particular realities of the coaching partner quickly? Does the coach inspire trust?

+ INDUSTRY/COMPANY KNOWLEDGE: Does the coach have knowledge of the company or industry of the coaching partner? How well does the coach understand the culture, competitive environment and structure of the company or industry?

+ Fit: Does the coach have a personal style and approach that matches the developmental needs of the coaching partner and the pressing business needs? Does the coach have experience with the key issues and development needs identified?

+ COST EFFECTIVENESS: Are there costs related to travel and geographic area that might need to be considered?

+ RESOURCES: Does the coach have an established network of internal and external resources? Does the coach have access to colleagues, materials, information or experiences that would serve the client system well?

+ INSTINCTS: What is your initial emotional and/or cognitive reaction to the coach? How compatible are your values and life views? Do you think you can trust the coach and adhere to all agreements about confidentiality, roles and objectives?

+ REFERENCES: Have you spoken with or do you know a peer who has experienced the coaching process with this coach? What benefits have others gained from working with this professional?

Summary

Coaching is an excellent resource for building internal capacity and accelerating development. Becky Ripley reminds us, "To ensure a successful coaching engagement, first determine whether or not a person is open and ready for coaching.

An individual who is willing to improve upon behaviors that have been 'good enough' in the past is far more likely to achieve successful outcomes. Next, con-

duct a rigorous coach selection process to ensure that the coach is a good fit for your specific needs."

Use the guidelines in this article prior to launching a coaching engagement to increase the likelihood of coaching success, thereby enhancing your return on investment.

For a free copy of our Innolect Coaching Readiness Checklist, email beckyr@innolectinc.com.

KITTIE W. WATSON, president and founder of Innolect Inc., is committed to growing the leader in everyone. An organizational communication expert and specialist in strategic issues management, cultural transformation and change implementation, Kittie's latest book is *Leadership Coaching: Fast Track to Effectiveness*. Using Innolect's *Innovative IntelligenceSM* methodologies, she accelerates how leaders define, think and reinvent themselves to lead more strategically. She is a member of the Enterprising Women Advisory Board and may be contacted at 803-396-8500. 



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