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Guest column

Executive coaching also can elevate company's high-potential workers

Catherine Lufkin

Shelley took a break from the month-end reports and leaned back in her chair. She couldn't believe how different life seemed today.

Just a year ago, she received a big promotion to division manager. This promotion was the carrot dangling at the end of a stick, a carrot that kept her motivated and drove her to work harder, faster and better than anyone else in the company.

After the promotion, it was only a couple of months before Shelley realized that she was in over her head. Something had changed when she took on her new role, but Shelley had no idea what it was.

The skills that had supported her quick rise in the company seemed to be failing her. Although business was good and she seemed to be keeping her head above water, she was working all the time and feeling totally stressed. She gave up her exercise routine to get into the office earlier. She was exhausted at the end of the day, but she wasn't sleeping at night.

Noticeable, too, was how the environment around the office had changed. Information seemed harder to come by. Colleagues didn't stop to have conversations with her or drop by her office. She didn't have time to talk to them even if they did. But she missed the interactions with co-workers. Shelley really wanted to know what was wrong.

She decided to confide in Ben, a former colleague. She explained her situation, ending with her heightened degree of concern for her job performance and the lack of confidence that had taken hold.

Ben said that he had faced the same issues earlier in his career and that the company had supplied him with an executive coach. He thought it was the piece of his leadership development that had been missing. When the missing piece was provided, everything else seemed to fall into place. Shelley took his advice and began working with an executive coach.

At a time when companies seem to be concentrating on cutting costs, providing an executive coach may seem pretty low on the priority list. But many companies realize that development of their high-potential executives increases customer retention and the bottom line.

For years, CEOs of some of the most successful and largest companies have relied on executive coaches. Henry McKinnell, CEO of Pfizer, Meg Whitman, CEO of eBay, and David Pottruck, CEO of Charles

Schwab & Co., are just a few who rely on a "trusted adviser."

But executive coaching is not just for CEOs. Coaching is a very useful tool for elevating the leadership capabilities of a high potential, or "hi-po." Hi-pos are heavily relied on to achieve results now. But more important, they will develop and guide the organization's future.

Objectives of coaching for 'hi-pos'

- Identify individual executive strengths and development needs.
- Identify the development areas to be addressed based on the organization's defined executive competencies.
- Create a clear and definitive development plan to build on strengths and address developmental needs.
- Establish metrics to measure professional growth.
- Improve leadership performance.
- Provide regular, ongoing feedback and development support through ongoing executive coaching that assures professional growth.

Outcomes for individual

- Adoption and/or reinforcement of executive leadership competencies crucial to the organization's culture.
- Positive and sustainable behavioral changes.
- Development of strong leadership practices.
- Leveraging of existing strengths.
- Informed career planning and im-proved job satisfaction.

Outcomes for organization

- Utilization of a uniform set of executive core competencies.
- Enhanced individual and organizational performance.
- Improved organizational bench strength.
- Retention of key employees.
- Reputation of investing in executives through development.
- Positively affect the organizational culture.
- Competitively positioned for continued growth and success.

Shelley leaned over her desk and prepared to go back to her reports. She definitely felt much calmer about her ability to perform in her new role; she was exercising again and sleeping at night.

Better yet, Shelley discovered that her co-workers once again were stopping by her office. Her contributions to the organization were being recognized and valued.

Working the plan, Shelley now is enjoying the journey toward achieving her goals.

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