



# What is Executive Coaching?

## Definitions from those who know

### What is coaching?

There is some confusion about what exactly coaching is, and how it differs from other 'helping behaviours' such as counselling and mentoring. Broadly speaking, **the CIPD defines coaching as developing a person's skills and knowledge so that their job performance improves, hopefully leading to the achievement of organisational objectives.** It targets high performance and improvement at work, although it may also have an impact on an individual's private life. It usually lasts for a short period and focuses on specific skills and goals.

Although there is a lack of agreement among coaching professionals about precise definitions, these are some generally agreed characteristics of coaching in organisations:

- It is essentially a non-directive form of development.
- It focuses on improving performance and developing individuals' skills.
- Personal issues may be discussed but the emphasis is on performance at work.
- Coaching activities have both organisational and individual goals.
- It assumes that the individual is psychologically well and does not require a clinical intervention.
- It provides people with feedback on both their strengths and their weaknesses.
- It is a skilled activity which should be delivered by trained people.

*Source: CIPD*

### What is Executive Coaching?

There is no single, universally agreed definition of Executive Coaching. Like other professions (e.g. psychotherapy) how it is being defined depends on the particular 'bias' of the definer (e.g. those from a business background, those from a psychological background). Definitions also seem to focus on either the 'what' (what an Executive Coach does) or 'who' (where in the organisation the coachee typically sits.)

**We've listed below the opinions of those who know, to help define Executive Coaching...**



**"Exec coaching focuses on improving the performance of leaders & managers by skillfully utilising their inherent expertise & knowledge so they find the most effective solutions to their problems."**

*John Leary-Joyce*



**Executive coaching (one-to-one coaching) is when a person works individually with a coach on their own particular areas of strengths and weaknesses to fulfil their potential.**

*Sir John Whitmore*



“Executive Coaching is a facilitative one-to-one, mutually designed relationship between a professional coach and a key contributor who has a powerful position in the organisation...The coaching is contracted for the benefit of a client who is accountable for highly complex decisions with wide scope of impact on the organization and industry as a whole. The focus of the coaching is usually focused on organisational performance or development, but it may also serve a personal component as well.”

*Summary findings from the International Executive Coaching Summit,  
October 1999*



Executive coaching is an experiential and individualised leader development process that builds a leader’s capability to achieve short- and long-term organisational goals. It is conducted through one-on-one interactions, driven by data from multiple perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organisation, an executive, and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum impact.

*The Executive Coaching Forum*



‘A form of tailored, work-related development for senior and professional managers which spans business, functional and personal skills’

*Institute of Employment Studies*



Management development is important, but just as a successful sportsman will progress from group to individual coaching as their abilities grow, so successful individuals can learn more rapidly through having individual attention that is designed around their specific learning needs at key career points.

*Carole Pemberton Editor of Coaching to Solutions*



Those working with senior level executives who have fiduciary responsibility to multiple stakeholders; stewardship of human, financial, intellectual, capital and social resources; and economic, social and environmental well-being of entire communities. The Executive Coach working with such individuals serves as strategic partner to the executive leader and his/her team. The Executive Coach’s skills include business acumen and financial management, leadership and organizational skills, analytic and innovative thinking as well as an ability to inspire trust and commitment to action.

*ICF Summit, Florida, 1999*



Executive Coaching is exclusively for key contributors who have a powerful position in the organisation who are accountable for highly complex decisions with wide scope of impact on the organisation and industry as a whole.

*ICF Summit, Atlanta, 2002*



‘Someone from outside an organisation who uses psychological skills to help a person develop into a more effective leader. These skills are applied to specific present-moment work problems in a way that enables this person to incorporate them into his or her permanent management or leadership repertoire’.

*1Bruce Peltier, (2001)*



‘A helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and consequently to improve the effectiveness of the client’s organisation within a formally defined coaching agreement.’

*Richard Kilburg (2000)*



Coaching is about performing at your best through the individual and private assistance of someone who will challenge, stimulate and guide you to keep growing.

Essentially it is about helping you to reach self-actualisation - a point at which you not only truly know yourself but within this knowledge possess a feeling of comfort with and understanding of the person you discover.

Your coach engages in a collaborative alliance with you to establish and clarify purpose and goals and to develop a plan of action to achieve those goals. They will establish an understanding of what is really important to you in life and subsequently enable you to take charge of your life; to construct and act upon action plans that will help you to realise these priorities. Put simply, coaching is about helping you to create and work towards the grandest version of the greatest personal vision you have; to achieve success - success being the continuous realisation of a worthy goal or ideal.

You will be guided through a detailed process beginning with the need to re-evaluate your present position, who you really are, where your priorities lie and the need to make a definite and conscious decision about the future you would like to create. With the help of a personal life coach you really can re-shape your life, overcome all the obstacles and live the life that you love.

Coaching is essentially a conversation - that is, a dialogue between you and your coach. Within a productive, results-oriented context, coaching involves coaching you to access what you already know. The reality is that you have the answers to all your questions - asked and unasked. Your coach provides the essential assistance, support and encouragement to seek and find these answers; to guide you towards asking the right questions, and deal with the answers.

Coaching also incorporates learning and yet a coach is not a teacher and will not necessarily know how to do things better than you but this does not matter. Your coach will observe patterns - set the stage for new actions and then work with you to put these new, more successful actions into place. This involves learning through various coaching techniques such as listening, reflecting, asking questions and providing information. Finally, and most importantly, your coach will help you learn how to become self-correcting and self-generating. That is, you will learn how to correct your own behaviour, generate your own questions and find your own answers.

*Gerard O'Donovan's Definition of Coaching, Author: Gerard O'Donovan*

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