You know you’d like your organisation to benefit from executive coaching, but you’re really not sure if anyone’s used it before and you think the chances are that the Board or senior management will ‘pooh pooh’ the whole idea. So how do you gain their buy-in?

So that you know how to approach senior management for their buy-in, start with exploring a few thoughts and answering some questions for yourself such as:

- Why use executive coaching?
- Who is it that needs executive coaching?
- How do you gain executive buy-in?
- What about the individual concerned?

In this piece I’ll aim to give you some insights into the above so you can gain greater clarity when assessing the questions against your own organisation’s needs.

**Why use executive coaching?**
Organisations choose to use executive coaching for many reasons including: sorting out a problem, enhancing someone’s current performance, bringing out the potential in an individual and occasionally also to help a person come to understand that they are in the wrong role or organisation. Sometimes it’s not even that defined and coaching can be utilised where you know something’s not quite right, but you can’t quite put your finger on it. How you gain senior buy-in really depends on which of the above is the reason you want to use executive coaching in the first place. More on that a little later…

**Who needs executive coaching?**
The other crucial factor in deciding on your approach to gaining Board or senior management approval for executive coaching is the level of the individual you have identified for executive coaching. The higher the person in seniority, the more resistance you are likely to meet and the more it will pay to gain the CEO’s backing. If it’s a Board member then you’ll need the Chairman or CEO’s buy-in (depending on whether they’re a NED or Executive Board member).

**How do you gain senior management buy-in?**
You know you want to use coaching and you may even have a coach in mind, but you still have the tricky problem of getting sign-off from senior management, so what do you do? The easiest place to start is actually to identify a person related problem that needs solving in your organisation as people will focus far more easily on solving problems than enhancing things they perceive to be just fine or manageable.

There are five steps to the process of gaining senior management buy-in that can be used successfully:

- Identify the symptoms manifesting in the business and outline these to the senior management member/team
Discuss the underlying causes which may include issues outside of or separate to the individual concerned

Check with senior management what their ideal outcome is for the situation/individual

Get them to define the effect that they perceive and even hope the outcome will have on the business and the individual concerned

Finally, ask them to identify what resources they think are missing for the individual/situation (this can include training, a helper, more acceptance of change, etc and is the key part so it’s important to get them to state it in the positive, rather than outline again what’s wrong)

This process will provide clarity to senior management. Once you’ve got their focus on what’s really needed in terms of ‘inner resources’, rather than what’s wrong they’ll want to know the HOW. You’ll be able to suggest coaching or if that’s a step too far suggest that they explore the subject with a coach (effectively an interview for the coach) to see what’s possible for the individual. If you’re not confident that you’ll be able to elicit the right information from the above process have your preferred coach come in and chat to senior management using the framework outlined above.

What about the individual?
The bottom line is that whatever the level of seniority of the coachee, ultimately you’ll need to gain the individual’s buy-in. With a Board member you’ll find that a conversation with the individual just between them and the CEO (or Chairman) is a good starting point. If you know there’s a problem talk to the coach first and arrange a private meeting between the CEO/line manager and the coach as they can help the CEO with the positioning of the coaching to gain the individual’s buy-in.

It may be that someone is not performing well (at Director/Board level) due to various factors and despite conversations with the CEO nothing has changed. A more formal conversation with T&D or HR in the meeting so it become less an option, but more a ‘must have’ is sometimes necessary. With this route though you’ll need to agree with the coachee that they can vet a short-list of coaches approved of by the CEO/line manager/HR (whichever is appropriate in your business). If you can get the CEO to state their goals, the coachee to agree them and they are reviewed after a few sessions formally with the coach and separately with the CEO everyone will be aligned with the issues, progress and outcomes. It’s a good pulse check and ensures the coachee stays focused and the CEO is realistic about progress and results. A review again at the end of the agreed number of sessions with both CEO and coachee is always a good idea.

Also, with performance problems and reluctant coachees you’ll need to factor in that the coach, once selected, will take longer to gain results than if the coachee was the one who wanted coaching in the first place as the coach will first have to overcome the individual’s resistance and gain their buy-in and trust before being able to elicit the desired changes.

However you use executive coaching, and with whomever, if you get the right coach you can make amazing changes to the performance of an individual, a team and ultimately the bottom-line!

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