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Three Reasons Today's CEO Needs a Coach

More and more business leaders admit to using coaches. Given the recent spectacular leadership failures of big-company CEOs, more boards of directors are encouraging use of executive coaches. Organizational psychologists and management consultants recommend CEO coaches.

What's behind this trend? CEOs of yore got along fine without executive coaches. The short answer is the accelerating rate of change. Leaders are being forced to do more with less, make increasingly complex decisions in shrinking time windows, and react to volatility in many sectors of their business lives. Moreover, growing government regulations and a polarized political climate add to the CEO's burdens. Uncertainty abounds.

So, since you don't have time to waste on a long list, I offer my "Top 3" list of reasons today's CEOs need a coach.

Truth - The CEO needs to hear the truth more than anyone else in the organization, but gets it less from employees. A good coach points out a leader's blind spots, biases, and shortcomings. Moreover, the coach offers practical solutions to mitigate the risks/problems caused by these attitudes and behaviors.

Priorities - Today's fast moving environment creates a situation where leaders have less time for self-reflection. Monthly meetings with an executive coach offer the leader scheduled time for reflection. The coach will introduce new discussion subjects as appropriate, and remind the leader of prior personal commitments that may have been sidetracked. The CEO always leaves a coaching session with a few changes in his or her near-term priorities.

Problem Solving - Leaders lose perspective during times of intense pressure. A wise coach helps a CEO temporarily relax his focus and zoom out to scan the horizon and see the big picture. This often results in new options to solve a problem, or additional choices entirely.

In their just-published book *Decisive*, authors Chip & Dan Heath compare the quality of the business decision-making process to that of a teenage girl! Researchers both, the brothers Heath cite studies to support this startling allegation. [For you Martians out there who just landed on Earth, human teenage girls exhibit a very narrow range of options when faced with a problem. Example: "Should I break up with my boyfriend or not."]

The leader's coach should have mental tripwires that raise the alarm when a leader uses "whether or not" phrasing and other examples of too narrow a focus.

- *Should the teenage girl break up with her boyfriend? Should we purchase XYZ Corporation?* These are both examples of limiting yourself to one choice. Better the CEO says, "*Should we purchase XYZ Corporation, spin off our logistics division, or find at least one more merger opportunity?*" Those are three distinct choices that avoid the trap of too much pressure to make a deal that might not work.

Moreover, an experienced executive coach understands the “power of and” when addressing problems, and may recommend Albert Einstein’s problem solving advice to “spend 90% of the time defining the problem and the remaining 10% solving it.”

If you are a CEO and don’t have a coach, spend time thinking about acquaintances outside your organization. Picture in your mind the image of your ideal coach; think about his or her background, experience, and temperament. If an actual person doesn’t occur to you, ask trusted advisors if they could recommend someone. Once you know what you’re looking for, the search process becomes much easier.



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A change in perspective is worth 20 IQ points

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