

What is *Success* right out of the Gates?



Feature Article

Helping Newly Hired and Promoted Executives Succeed

by Tony Klingmeyer

Problem

"Four out of ten newly promoted managers and executives fail within the first 18 months, according to research by Manchester, Inc., a Bala Cynwyd, PA based leadership development firm." *Failing* includes being terminated for performance, performing significantly below expectations or voluntarily resigning from the new position.

Many of the challenges facing newly recruited or promoted managers, executives today include:

- Belief of and adherence to the myth of individualism (a belief that success is an individual matter - every person succeeds or fails on the basis of his or her own individual efforts and abilities). This particular set of beliefs is a common pitfall for new managers previously successful in an individual contributor's role.
- The increased importance of the "culture fit" between newly recruited or promoted manager and the team, department, division or enterprise they become responsible to and for.
- A desire on the part of executives for better balance between work and personal life.
- Organizations' higher-than-ever expectations for results, but shorter-than-ever patience for seeing results achieved.

Solution

Turning around this high rate of executive failure requires an organizational culture that encourages and funds a coaching relationship with the new executive.

The Wall Street Journal on July 3, 2001 reported that executive or "assimilation coaches" are helping newly hired executives manage the transition from the first day. "It's a result of the job market," says

Bernadette Kenny, an executive vice president at Lee Hecht Harrison, an outplacement counseling firm in Woodcliff Lake, NJ. "More organizations are making senior leadership changes and bringing in talent from the outside. The demands placed on these executives to produce IMMEDIATELY are enormous. So these people must be effective as quickly as possible."

The use of executive/assimilation coaches has increased during the last two years, Ms. Kenny reports. The greatest demand comes from technology, advertising, publishing, manufacturing and insurance companies. Some assimilation coaches begin to advise executives before they start their new role. They help the executive clarify what's expected of them, develop strategically aligned action plans and assess perceived and real barriers to success.

Executives are looking for help managing the *speed* of change. Although hardly new, this trend has been exacerbated by the nagging fear a company's leadership has of becoming either obsolete or technology-driven toast in response to an ever changing, transforming business environment. "I've never seen business people have to fake it more," says B. Joseph White, Dean of University of Michigan's Business School.

Today, new managers don't have to fake it when they have access to a coach who aids them with their weekly leadership and management challenges. Executive development and learning/mastering how to create productive relationships starts by achieving clarity -- clarity in terms of establishing and communicating the leadership's direction, goals & expectations and roles of both the executive and key staffers. Clarity (aka "clear agreements") is a fundamental "distinction" professional coaches focus on with their executive clients.

Who needs an executive coach?

FORTUNE magazine reports (July 23, 2001 issue) that one reader said, "I went into the coaching experience kicking and screaming, at the insistence of my then-boss. And what an eye-opener it turned out to be. I won't even go into the grim details of bad management habits I had unthinkingly developed in my 14-year career up to that point--but I will say that since I was 'cured' by 12 weeks of pretty intense coaching, I've been promoted three times."

And what about the CEO of an organization? As the old saying goes, "It's lonely at the top." And that's why CEO coaching is a very useful tool for the person who carries the weight of responsibility for the organization. A fatal flaw many CEO's exhibit is to insulate or isolate themselves based on the Myth of Individualism – or what I call "The Lone Ranger Paradigm": the cultural belief that one succeeds or fails on the basis of individual efforts and abilities. This assumption is so powerful that when an alternative view is suggested-- success of our companies depends on the quality of our relationships as much as it does with our individual performance--the usual reaction is denial. Denial of the role that relationships play in the CEO's, and ultimately the company's, success preserves the self-enhancing illusion that we are masters of our own fates: we receive all of the credit for our successes.

A primary purpose of coaching is to provide the CEO of an organization with a sounding board to think through key issues – both strategic and

tactical. Sometimes the coach becomes a “mirror”, reflecting back to the executive what he/she is thinking and communicating. Sometimes the coach advises, providing alternate perspectives to assist the executive in broadening his/her perspective. And ALWAYS the coach is an advocate, supporting, challenging and partnering with the CEO.

The relationship created with the executive coach supplements, but does not replace, existing relationships with the CEO's senior management, board members or other advisors. One advantage of the executive coaching relationship is that there are no 'strings attached' to conversations – such as those that exist when the parties have on-going formal relationships and established roles and expectations. The coach's sole focus is on the client, the client's agenda and what the client hopes to accomplish.

The typical coaching relationship contains these elements:

1. The executive/manager agrees to participate in one or more confidential personal assessments delivered by the executive coach. These assessments tools can provide information to the executive on "Who am I?", "How do others see me?", "What kind of leader must I be?", and "What fundamental changes must I make in order to be most effective?" The personal assessment process helps the executive discover how s/he impacts others and provides a solid foundation for the on-going coaching relationship or process.
2. The coaching 'process' involves periodic phone conversations or in-person meetings between the executive and the coach. One to four conversations per month are necessary to maintain a continuity and mutual understanding of critical issues.
3. A successful coaching relationship is one where the CEO/Executive consistently gains critical insights into issues faced. Most often these insights do not come from specific advice given by the coach (i.e. consulting) on the content of an issue, but rather from a clarification of the CEO's thinking process about the many elements impacting the issue(s).

For most senior-level people, coaching is paid for by their employer. The coaching fees range from \$1,000 - \$2,500 per month with an initial term of 3 - 6 months, and the fee is most often based on the client's span of influence within his/her organization.

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Special Thanks to John Agno for his contribution! John can be reached at <http://home.att.net/~coachthee/Archives/successformula.html>.