

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?