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Selecting An Executive Coach

By Donald Hutton, FACHE

According to James Tally, Ph.D., president and CEO of Children's Healthcare Atlanta, "It's important to find a good listener who will give you straightforward feedback" when you're looking for an executive coach. "Make sure that the coach has strong working knowledge of the industry," he says. "Do enough background research to be confident that you're hiring the right person. Communicate your expectations to your coach up front, and discuss what you want to get out of the process. Have a conversation and see if your personalities match; you'll need to feel comfortable enough with this person to hold open, honest discussions about your performance."

Most people who have used coaches offer the same advice. As a guideline, you may wish to consult a book by Mary Beth O'Neill, Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart: A Systems Approach to Engaging Leaders with Their Challenges (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000). The book summarizes that a good executive coach:

- Works effectively in the midst of others' anxiety
- Focuses on business and results
- Listens well
- Can move conversations from the global to the specific
- Gives immediate feedback
- Supports and challenges you in equal measure
- Has a sense of humor, and

• Lets others create their own successes and mistakes.

--Donald Hutton

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