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Improving Performance with an Executive Coach

Executive coaching can enhance both individual and organizational results.

Today's senior-level healthcare executives have no shortage of challenges to overcome. Balancing the demands of multiple key constituencies—from patients to physicians to the board—can leave healthcare executives feeling overwhelmed and unable to keep up with the rapidly changing healthcare environment. Meeting these demands requires a unique balance of technical and interpersonal skills, self-knowledge, and the ability to set and meet performance goals.

One effective tool available to senior-level healthcare executives is executive coaching. In the past couple of years, many executives have begun to use executive coaches to increase their efficiency, develop leadership skills, or address specific personal or organizational goals. Professional executive coaches use feedback mechanisms, assessment tools, and proven leadership models to help executives increase personal and professional awareness and identify and achieve goals. Coaches also introduce executives to new skill sets and techniques designed to help them deal effectively with the challenges associated with the rapidly changing organizations they lead. Although the coach works with an individual executive, coaching interventions often contribute to the improved performance of the organi-

zation as a whole because the executive can more efficiently manage his or her responsibilities while providing more effective guidance to direct reports.

If you have participated in leadership skills assessments in the past, you're probably already familiar with some aspects of executive coaching. But because coaches work directly with individual executives for an extended length of time, executive coaching is a more intensive, personal experience than most leadership skills assessments and can produce far greater results. Further, while leadership assessments may be conducted by management consultants with limited knowledge of the healthcare field, healthcare executive coaches are experienced in working with top healthcare leaders and have an excellent knowledge of the healthcare field.

The coaching process involves the following five elements, each of which contributes to increasing the executive's focus and discipline.

1. Formation of a relationship between executive and coach

The first element in any coaching process is building a relationship between the person being coached and the person doing the coaching. In part, the terms of the relationship will be defined by the executive's goals; the coach must support

the executive's efforts to achieve those goals. But while it is the coach's job to be encouraging, he or she is not merely a cheerleader. The coach must also challenge, probe, and confront the executive throughout the process, leading the executive to see the world—and him- or herself—in a clear and accurate fashion.

2. Expansion of the executive's self-awareness

It is normal for senior-level executives to have blind spots that prevent the full understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. A valuable and necessary part of executive coaching is the coach's ability to expose these blind spots and help executives make plans to address weaknesses. Increased self-awareness allows executives to have a clear image of their personality and management style and how these factors affect others. By identifying both strengths and weaknesses, the coaching process not only helps executives target specific problems in their leadership skill sets but also provides a starting point from which to leverage personal growth opportunities.

3. Establishment of goals

Coaching is useless without the establishment of goals and a plan to achieve those goals. Most executives use coaches to achieve personal and professional objectives, such as expanding their leadership and operational skills, address-

ing specific weaknesses, or building and maintaining critical relationships. But coaching can also address other types of goals, including organizational performance objectives. In effect, the executive coach will partner with the executive to accomplish performance expectations.

4. Use of feedback

The fourth element in the coaching process is the provision of timely, objective feedback. Senior-level executives receive informal feedback on a consistent basis, but most report that this feedback is “watered down” or unclear, making it difficult to use. Executive coaching provides a more formal method of feedback. Most coaches will use some form of 360-degree evaluation, in which the executive is evaluated by supervisors, direct reports, and peers. The combination of this type of feedback with hands-on coaching enables the executive to use feedback results to address specific on-the-job issues right away.

5. Renewal and growth

Self-renewal is essential in the growth process. Many executives reach a high level of success only to lose their edge and see their performance falter. Executive coaching addresses this problem by making opportunities for learning and growth a regular part of the executive’s leadership agenda. A coach can show the executive how to make time to pursue self-development in the midst of a busy and chaotic environment.

The executive coaching process has proven results. The executive experiences increased self-awareness and openness to change, while becoming more effective in finding new ways to lead, grow, and improve. The executive’s professional life—and in some cases, personal life—

improves due to a greater sense of control. Finally, organizational performance improves as well, resulting in increased profits, customer satisfaction, market share, and employee morale. ▲

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