BOOK REVIEWS

Translated version

EXECUTIVE COACHING: RELATIONSHIP AND DIALOGUE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

COACHING: O EXERCÍCIO DA LIDERANÇA.

Marshall Goldsmith, Laurence Lyons & Sara McArthur (Orgs.). 3a ed. Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Editora Elsevier, 2012. 352 p.



Por

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This book brings together the practical experiences in executive coaching processes conducted by internationally renowned professionals. The work is composed of 31 chapters organized into seven thematic parts. Part I (Foundations of Coaching) establishes the conceptual basis of coaching and makes it accessible to a wide audience. The five chapters in this part are written by renowned experts in the fields of coaching, management, and business. Part II (Portrait of a Leader) discusses current leadership practices and consists of six chapters. Part III (Challenges and Forces of Change) comprises five chapters that explore coaching practices in a changing world; of these, Sally Helgersen's "Awareness coaching for men and women" is the most noteworthy. Part IV (Recognizing and Developing High-performance Leaders) brings together, in six chapters, several studies on key topics of leadership and coaching. Part V (In Action), consists of five chapters that focus on the development of high-performance leaders for the future. Part VI (Coaching Models and Tools), comprising four chapters, evaluates the effectiveness of the well-researched and proven coaching practices. The discussion by Barbara Mintzer-McMahon on the issue of gender differences and its influence on coaching actions stands out. Part VII (Coaching: The Leadership Exercise—Premium Content Available on the Internet), which brings together articles in English available online, is especially recommended for beginners in leadership coaching.

Marshall Goldsmith, recognized worldwide as one of the most influential thinkers in the field of leadership, is the author of best-selling books on business and management. Laurence S. Lyons is a pioneer in the field of executive coaching, organizational development, and change management. Sarah McArthur is the founder of a company providing writing and editing services and has more than 20 years of experience.

The authors identify the aspects that they consider fundamental to a successful coaching process. The coaching process should be understood as a relationship. Relating to others implies a mutual exchange between two or more individuals with common goals. Thus, grounding the coaching process in a relationship of trust and mutual respect is essential for success. The authors of this book stress that the coach does not need to become a "friend" of the client because being "loved" by the client does not improve the results of the coaching process. Although friendship may exist,

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it is not something that increases the chances of coaching success.

The work presents three coaching attitudes essential for success: (1) remaining focused on the client and reaching his or her goals, rather than those of the coach; (2) avoiding self-satisfaction: the coach cooperates for the client's success, not for the achievement of the goals considered useful for the former; and (3) respecting the client by using approaches that are aligned to his or her personal beliefs and values.

In the coaching process, one must consider that the client is a part of several social spheres; thus, the coach's understanding of the client as an open system that is connected to other systems is crucial in defining goals. Disregarding these distinct and interrelated social spheres may undermine the desired results. The coach needs to have a holistic understanding of the client, and develop the ability to listen—a quality that is necessary to build empathy. These three competencies—holistic understanding, listening, and empathy—are closely interrelated; there is no empathy if we do not hear what the client is talking about and understand him or her holistically. Communication is a fundamental tool in the coaching process: it is by listening that we can create genuine dialogue with each other. Further, the dialogue in the coaching process is important in fostering self-awareness and promoting behavioral change in the client.

Executive coaches need to have some understanding of the client's business as this will not only promote empathy, but also stimulate more complex and deeper dialogues. In this coaching niche, dialogue will always lead to the development of an action plan for the executive client. Executive coaching comprises four steps: (1) preparation (understanding the environment); (2) evaluation (what are the various aspects of this environment?); (3) diagnosis (what needs to be changed in this environment?); and (4) intervention (what should be done for the desired change to happen?). The choice of interventions is based on these four stages. In the case of intermediate-level leaders, the emphasis is on behavioral change; for senior-level executive leaders, coaching covers strategy building and policy understanding.

Some specific points must be considered while conducting executive coaching, which aims to: (1) change behavior and (2) provide strategic understanding. Executive coaching addresses the development of organizational leadership, whose goals help in achieving the company's goals and strategies. That is, executive coaching focuses on changing leadership behavior in the workplace.

The fact that the coach is not in the client's organizational environment represents a challenge. One way to overcome this difficulty is to switch from individual sessions with the client to meetings with the human resources department of the company. In this regard, it is necessary to reflect on issues, such as confidentiality and ethics. To what extent can the content of individual sessions be shared with the company representatives, given that the coaching process is an investment by the company in the development of professionals that will help it to achieve strategic institutional goals.

Although this is a book written by foreign authors, the coaching concepts and practices are widely applicable to the Brazilian context. The elements of executive coaching in Brazil are closer to those practiced in the United States than the ones in Europe. The influence of American culture on Brazilian business thinking makes the concepts, methods, and tools addressed in this book suitable for the Brazilian context.

However, some aspects of Brazil's historical and cultural context, such as the primacy of the personal relationships in social interactions, must be considered by executive coaching professionals; thus, the relationship between coach and client should be more professional than it currently is. The challenge for the Brazilian coach is to measure the level of personal involvement; he or she must understand that the customer remains the principal agent of his success; he or she should act as facilitator for the client's success, but not assume responsibility for it because the coaching process' outcome is dependent far more on the client's motivation to succeed than the coach's competencies.

One of the shortcomings of the executive coaching processes in Brazil is the lack of tested and trusted practices; the great variety of coaching techniques of questionable quality leads to a bias against the process among the executives. This book provides coaching professionals with valuable tools that suit the Brazilian business context. The wide-ranging content as well as the technical competence and experience of its authors make this book required reading for every executive coach.

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