

DO YOU NEED A COACH?

Are you short of time? Do you want to develop new skills, plan for growth, balance your work with your home life? Here's how to find the help you need.

BY TOM ADAMS

"At least once every day, some days every hour, I wanted to walk out the door and never come back," Greta Harris is fond of recalling. "I had come to Richmond to become the executive director of the Neighborhood Housing Services, a small struggling nonprofit whose goal was to revitalize the Barton Heights neighborhood. The only reason I didn't give up in those first months was the support I got from a field services officer from our national organization and ultimately the executive coach she introduced me to."

While Greta Harris is now a strong advocate of coaching, she didn't start out that way. When she first met her coach, Grizel Ubarry, Harris was dubious. "Grizel would come in here and listen for a while and then strongly suggest three or four things for me to do. Then she'd send me a note with the same suggestions and a timetable. She drove me crazy. Over time, though, I realized that was exactly what I needed to get focused on the real job of being an executive director. It is doubtful we could ever have turned this organization around or made the progress we have without Grizel and her pushing me and the organization towards our best. A nearly defunct organization is now one of the best nonprofits in the city in large part due to the coaching Grizel provided me and our organization."

WHO'S USING COACHES?

Greta Harris is not alone in turning to an executive coach. Increasingly nonprofit executives and managers are finding coaches a terrific sounding board and source of help in a demanding and complex job. Cheryl Casciani, executive director of a Baltimore citizen action nonprofit, comments: "My transition from an engineering profession at Arco to directing the Fellows Program at the Annie E. Casey Foundation was a no-brainer compared to the stresses and challenges of becoming an executive director. I coach a sports team myself, but it would have never dawned on me to look for a coach. One appeared, and he's been extraordinarily useful. Our conversations help me to stay focused and to sort out the big-picture questions for our organization. Our budget and staff have tripled in two years. The coaching relationship has been indispensable in managing this rapid growth."

Coaching doesn't appeal only to new executives. *The Washington Post* (November 14, 1997) reported on John Tyding's return from sabbatical as chief executive of the Greater Washington Board of Trade. After 27 years, he called a time out for mountain climbing and renewal, and "his personal coach helped him dig into the pluses and minuses of his managerial approach."

WHY USE A COACH?

Nonprofit executives, managers, and staff are most likely to turn to coaches to help them do the following:

- Sharpen career goals and assess employment decisions.
- Restore the balance between work and family.
- Provide support and a sounding board during periods of growth, downsizing, or other transitions.

COULD YOU USE A COACH?

- Do you need to develop new competencies? For example, are you a technically strong manager who needs to develop entrepreneurial, financial, or board-relationship skills?
- Does your organization face leadership issues, such as planning for growth, charting a new direction, or making strategic choices?
- Do you want to build teams in your organization? Do you need help with board or staff leadership?
- Do you face a transition to a new role?
- Do you seem never to have enough time? Do you need help balancing your personal and work lives?

If so, you could use a good coach!

WHERE CAN YOU FIND A COACH?

Here are some resources to help you find a coach in your community:

- International Coach Federation of America, 1-888-423-3131 or www.coachfederation.org (Web site includes list of chapters around the country and world and a referral page to identify coaches with specific expertise and in specific locations)
- State associations of nonprofit organizations
- Management support organizations
- Society for Nonprofit Organizations' *National Directory of Nonprofit Service & Product Providers* (in every issue of *Nonprofit World*; see page 27 of this issue).

- Achieve goals more quickly.
- Facilitate a planning process that is practical and strategic.

The Center for Creative Leadership, an internationally-recognized training and research organization for private, public, and nonprofit executives, published *Four Essential Ways That Coaching Can Help Executives* by Robert Witherspoon and Randall P. White. The authors say the purpose of coaching is to help “an executive learn, grow, and change.” Coaching, they observe, is a flexible way to pay attention to these four vital areas: your goals, skills, performance, and development.

HOW DOES COACHING WORK?

Coaching is different from counseling, consulting, therapy, mentoring, and other supportive relationships. “I see myself as a partner to the executive,” coach Grizel Ubarry explains. “Most executives have too much to do. As a coach, my job is to increase the clarity of focus and goals and to add value in achieving these goals. After a typical meeting, both the executive and I have some assignments to carry out. Our ongoing contact insures that the important things get done—and get done more efficiently.”

Some coaching relationships last for a few months, others for years. Regular, consistent communication is key. Some coaches communicate with executives mostly by phone in weekly or biweekly appointments of 30-60 minutes. Others use regularly scheduled meetings or a combination of phone, meetings, and e-mail.

Rhona Post, a Virginia-based executive coach, offers clients a choice. “I always start with a face-to-face meeting to get to know one another and to figure out what the goal is. After that we agree either to focus on a defined set of activities over a specific time or to work ad hoc by phone or in person for a period of time. I see myself as helping people get in touch with their own inner wisdom and observe their behavior without judgment.”

Post echoes her mentor, Julio Olalla, a native of Chile who trains coaches throughout the world. Olalla distinguishes coaching from teaching or training. Teaching is concerned with giving information, and training is concerned with increasing mastery, while coaching is about improving wisdom and developing “the observer within.”

Borrowing from Chris Agyris, Olalla cites three elements to consider in any situation: the observer, the action, and the result. Most change efforts are focused on the action and the result. Olalla, on the other hand, encourages focusing on the observer. What people tell themselves about what’s going on is the key place to look when desiring change.

HOW MUCH DOES A COACH COST?

Fees for coaching vary widely, depending on who is paying (organization or individual), the experience of the coach, and the complexity of the program. Coaches may charge by the hour (\$75 and up) or through a monthly retainer (\$350-\$1500).

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A COACH?

When looking for a coach, be as clear as possible about your goals. Check out the coach's experience in areas of special interest to you. There are a number of resources to help you locate a coach (see "Where Can You Find a Coach?" on page 45).

The best way to find out about coaching is to try it. Many coaches offer a free or reduced-cost initial meeting. Management fads and theories come and go; coach-

ing appears to have staying power because of the many ways it can benefit executives and organizations. ■

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These publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. For ordering information, see the Society's *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800-424-7367).

A WORD FROM YOUR COACH

A manager might say, "Here's what you need to do." A coach says, "Let me ask you some questions that can help you get a different view—one that may reveal more options."

Source: *Leadership and the Art of Conversation*, by Kim Krisco, Prima Publishing, P.O. Box 1260BK, Rocklin, California 95677, as noted in *Communication Briefings*, 1101 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314.

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