

Coaching Leadership Transitions

Climbing the Corporate Ladder without Falling Off

By Linda Miller, MCC, and Madeleine Homan, MCC

Is your organization like many others that are acknowledging the leadership shortfall that's ahead? Maybe yours already recognizes that leaders must be developed from within, yet there just does not seem to be enough time. Or, maybe your leaders see the need for leadership development and succession planning, but everyone seems to be focused on their own targets and goals, where compensation is linked.

Wherever you look inside companies, leaders are scrambling as they try to figure out how to bridge the impending leadership shortage gap. They know that something has to be done, but what? Many ways come to mind including mentoring, development projects, training and observing exemplars. Another way is coaching, and it is being recognized as a primary methodology for leadership development.

For example, when "Samantha" was hired, she was brought in as an expert in the field of software development. As a techno-geek, she was at the top of her game in developing innovative software solutions, and she made a dramatic contribution to the team. Her contribution caught the attention of her boss' boss who began making plans for her acceleration within the ranks. At first she did

fine, with a lot of help from her boss. But then, she was asked to step into the CIO role.

Unfortunately, what Samantha had in technical expertise, she lacked in management and leadership skills. So, Samantha was invited to work with an executive coach with an emphasis on moving from manager to leader. Samantha's boss knew that the behaviors Sam did well as a manager were not the same behaviors that would be needed in a leadership role. Her boss also recognized that coaching was a way of transitioning more quickly into a higher level of leadership.

When key people in organizations move from one level to the next, they need to become aware of the new behaviors that are needed and the behaviors that can be let go.

For example, Sam needed to *stop* doing the work herself and *start* delegating more to the people on her team who were ready to take on the projects. She needed to *stop* volunteering for more and more work herself and *start* focusing on developing others to do the work. She needed to *do less* observing in executive team meetings and *do more* sharing of ideas and thoughts.

Sam explored all of these behaviors with her coach when they talked by phone. Twice, the coach came to Sam's company and shadowed her, offering real-time feedback during or immediately after meetings. Sam began recognizing when she was taking on too much rather than putting the responsibility on others. She and her coach shared some good laughs as the coach gently pointed out, yet again, how easily Samantha took things on herself. One of the key questions that Sam routinely asked and which needed to change was simple but not easy. Instead of asking her direct reports, "What do you need from me?" she changed the question to, "What do you need?"

Leadership transitions are critical for organizations. Coaching cuts down on the time needed to make important transitions. When looking for a coach, be sure the coach has a proven track record and experience in leadership development, is certified by the International Coach Federation (www.coachfederation.org) and can work by telephone or face-to-face. Outstanding executive coaches throughout the world can help to make leadership transitions move forward smoothly and efficiently.



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