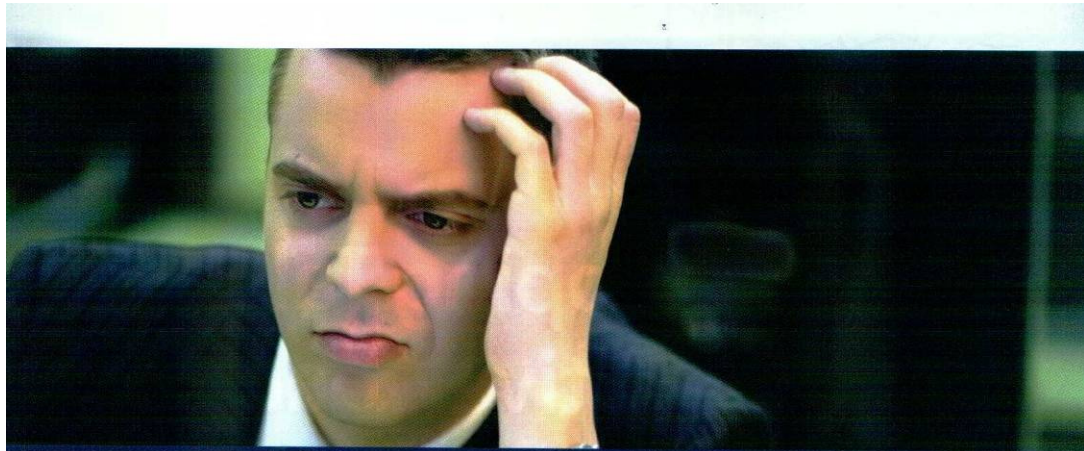


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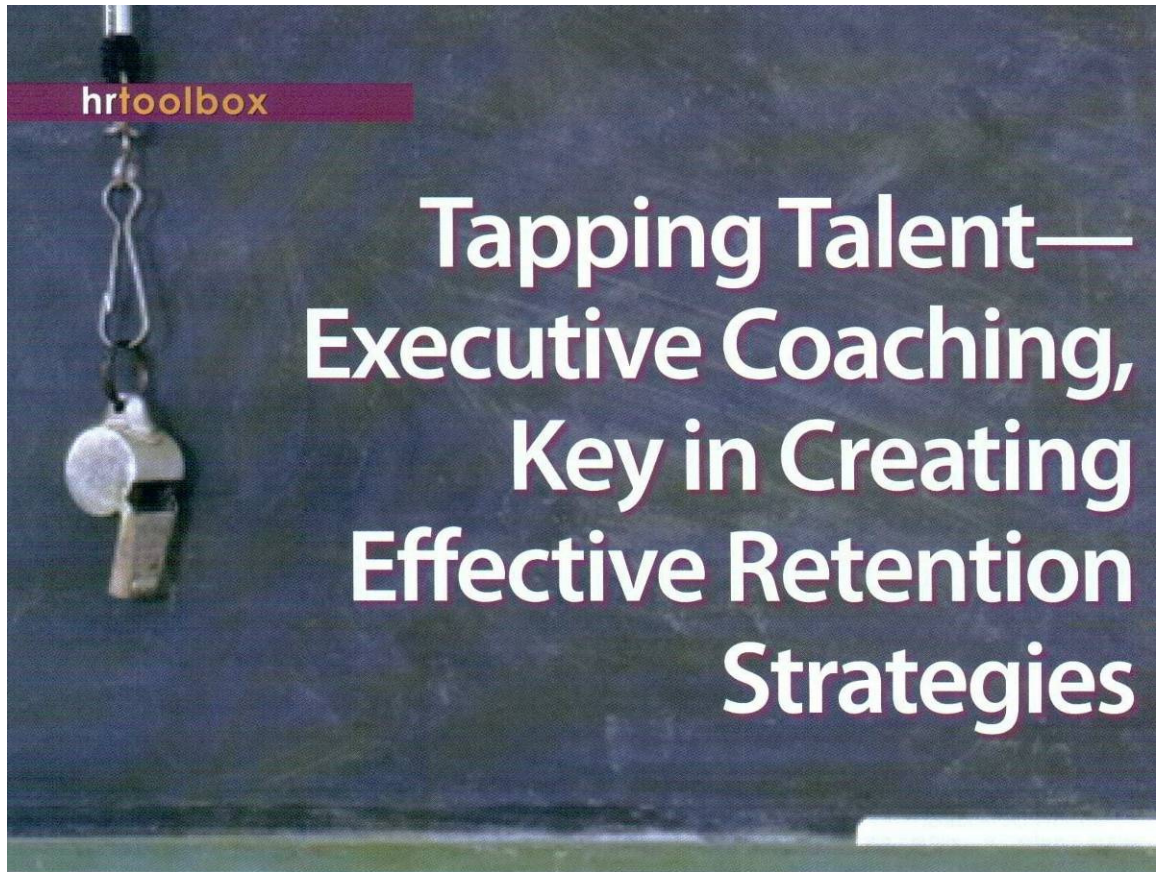
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Tapping Talent— Executive Coaching, Key in Creating Effective Retention Strategies

by **Helen Hanson**

In some organizations, the search for quality employees as well as talent management and development has taken a “back seat” to the focus on economic activity and stability. Our belief is that no matter how difficult the economic climate is, a company is only as good as the people in it, and organizations must continually strive to cultivate incumbent employees regardless of market conditions. Arresting the development of talent within an organization is de-motivating and a poor market position to hold.

The economic instability of the past 12 months has challenged employers. Priorities have shifted and the need in the short-term to focus on financial incentives to retain talent has decreased.

As the market improves, the best and brightest employees will again focus on career progression and development opportunities. Job transition for better options will pick up again.

Once the market recovery gains momentum, competitors are very likely to start poaching talented individuals. Working to keep your talent within this context will become even more critical; executive coaching can help. Below is a summary of what the process involves and key points you should consider.

Tailor it

An executive coaching program should always be tailored to each specific individual case. Every individual is different and therefore a unique coaching

program needs to be developed to meet the specific needs and issues arising.

Coaching is not a cost; it is an investment. What is relevant is what you get in return. Once you shift your paradigm to this focus, imagine what the cost could be to you and your organization when not utilizing effective coaching. The reason why those successful athletes engage a coach is because they want to become more effective, and to enhance their abilities. Why should this journey be any different for an executive?

Putting it into practice

Executive coaching is a highly useful tool for both organizations and individuals. Successful coaching practice includes:

- Supporting the induction or

- appointment of a senior person into a more senior, or different role;
- Accelerating the personal development of individuals defined as “high potential”;
- Underpinning the effective implementation of organizational change processes by way of supporting individuals and teams;
- Using an independent set of ears and sounding board to a senior individual;
- Using a mechanism to support senior individuals undertaking wider personal development such as 360 degree feedback processes or development centers;
- Offering a potential means of rewarding and retaining key individuals critical to the business;
- Establishing a bridge to get you from where you are to where you want to be; and
- Using as a tool to identify and overcome personal, internal obstacles to strategic goals.

Benefits for the individual

The expected outcomes for an individual engaged in executive coaching include:

- Enhanced resourcefulness and flexibility in dealing with real life events and transitions, in all aspects including personal or professional spheres;
- Re-engaging of focus with incentives to move forward with personal development, priority and goal setting;
- Enhanced understanding and awareness of oneself, impact on others and personality preferences;
- Greater awareness and understanding

of why one does certain things in the way one does it;

- Clearer perspectives and defined plans for the way forward to achieving personal and professional goals;
- An overall sense of reclaiming ones personal power and personal ownership of decisions and events;
- Achieving more consistent success and realizing better career clarity; and
- Enhanced awareness of personal “blind spots” and the identification of effective strategies to overcome them.

Attributes of a good coach

If you are looking for a coach, first you must check if they are a good fit. Your coach is there to motivate and guide your thought process. It is critical to engage with someone who communicates clearly, who is an excellent listener, who is genuinely interested in helping you meet or exceed your goals, and who is well organized. The coaching relationship needs to be built on trust and mutual respect. The more information you share, the more beneficial the experience will be overall. An external coach is usually the best, as confidentiality of information along with impartial and often more challenging feedback processes will be implemented.

Your coach should have broad industry experience, such as five years plus executive coaching, exposure to senior staff issues and concerns, exposure and/or certification in a variety of profiling tools and ability to give feedback, exposure and experience of organizational change plus a background in business management or the behavioral sciences.

Extracting an executive's potential

Organizations often have systems that enable them to identify “high potential, critical performers or key successors” within that organization. Executive coaching can be effectively used to support such individuals in developing core talents and honing skills.

It could be that even though an executive has an outstanding track record, they are now required to gain the greater interpersonal flexibility required of a more senior manager role. More specifically they may not yet be expert in influencing, a much sought after and highly important skill in the modern networked and often matrixed organization. Honing and developing this skill might well be an appropriate goal for a coaching program.

When the coaching relationship is well defined and constructed, the rewards are extremely tangible and positive in nature. As an organization, offering executive coaching to employees is often seen as a win-win situation. The employee feels valued, and at the same time their potential can be unlocked, increasing effectiveness and productivity. **HR**

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