

TOP 10 Signs You Could Use an Executive Coach

Adapted by Carole Lewis for HKICC from

<http://www.effectiveexecutivecoaching.com/top-10-signs.html>

10. Your team or corporate environment is experiencing interpersonal conflict
9. Sudden/unexplained "shift" or change in a crucial business indicator of success, specific to a particular industry
8. Decreased emphasis on preserving human capital
7. Oversimplification of strategy
6. Isolation and withdrawal
5. Increase in turnover, absenteeism and tardiness
4. Performance quotas missed
3. Complacency among managers (the "Fine Syndrome")
2. Insanity Defined: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.
1. Topping the list of signs: ***You say you don't need one!***

No. 10 – Your team or corporate environment is experiencing interpersonal conflict.

Many managers mistake this sign as a warning to look out for break room brawls or on-the-road-sales-call spats. It would be nice if it were that clear of a symptom. Actually, most corporate conflict occurs in a passive-aggressive-oriented manner due to the cost-benefit ratio that is perceived by most to favor keeping everything cool and status quo. The result? Withdrawal, implicit agreement with head nods yet under the breath sighs and actual behavioral compliance, and other creative ways to simply plateau peacefully. As quoted in the bestseller *Crucial Confrontations* (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2005:p. 17), a national poll of U.S. workers found that 44% reported putting in as little effort as they could get away with without being fired. If this speaks of human nature innately, as it is, nothing gives this statistic more fire to increase in percentage points as emotional or interpersonal conflict. Too bad that you won't see it so directly — till later when the "numbers come out." And sometimes it is too late. If you suspect sub-optimal performance, an executive coach can use interviewing skills and assessments to get at core issues quickly and efficiently and, most importantly, as an unbiased outsider.

No. 9 – Sudden/unexplained "shift" or change in a crucial business indicator of success, specific to a particular industry.

Many times the human performance element is too subtle for the keenest of managers and one is left with pure outcomes to tell the story. I have worked with executives that have hired me with the question "Doc, something is odd... Our numbers are down in this division, and it is a change from the norm. I don't get it. Those guys are great players for us." Executive coaches look for both the individual parameters (motivation, skill, confidence, knowledge gaps) that could have changed,

as well as systemic, environmental processes that may not have had optimal communication channels in place to support the stellar talent within, and the most common culprit, the combination of both. Executive coaches in these instances make sure they leave the client with performance enhancement tools as well as ways to increase feedback systems.

No. 8 – Decreased emphasis on preserving human capital

This is a difficult one to swallow and typically is couched within budget reasons. Given the excuse typically given out, it is a hard one used to justify calling in an executive coach, the Cadillac of human capital investment strategies. However, an executive coach will sometimes enter with one of the other Top Ten reasons cited here but will ultimately have this difficult discussion with the CEO. That is, that there are no personal flaws of a significant nature with his/her employees, but rather an insensitivity to the motivational systems that refill an "empty tank" and produce what Stephen Covey calls the 8th Habit of Success — personal fulfillment, the most desired aspect in a work environment. This characteristic is only attained with an investment in ways to engage workers significantly and give them the opportunity to feel alive. No one stops being fully human between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Someone once said, *"Don't ask yourself what the world needs from you. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and go do that. For the world needs more people that have come alive."* It is hard for us to do this if our paid job doesn't increase the probability of our making this more likely.

No. 7 – Oversimplification of strategy

To the man with a hammer, the world is a nail. Too bad the business world doesn't need more hammers. In fact, it is full of richly textured strategies to gain success. Has anyone done a meta-analysis of the factors needed for organizational excellence? Nope, no empiricism. Instead, tons of "7 steps to..." and "7 habits for..." What is it about this number 7? In my years of studying human nature in performance realms, I have yet to be granted such a divine revelatory experience that would lead me to such hubris of declaring the finite nature of tips, tools, or strategies that I could apply everywhere. Now, I can either see myself as inexperienced and incompetent, but my results with CEOs and their companies do not show that. Instead, I believe my approach with people is more of a personification of the paradoxical nature of truth. That is, the more I acknowledge individual differences and see the sense in human choice, the more truth of performance emerges naturally.

In my work as an executive coach I have seen many leaders fall victim to idolatry, hailing the God of their strategy at the expense of seeing their colleagues and direct reports as co-holders of the truth. Even if one does not believe that ultimately this is true, your choices are limited to get to the truth; one must engage those around you.

No. 6 – Isolation and withdrawal

Though many executives have busy travel schedules and unique personality differences that would predispose some to not be as present in the workplace as

others are, one needs to watch out for these variables. I have seen many professionals take the slippery slope down to failure, making daily if not moment by moment choices to avoid conflict and "check out." This disassociated strategy attempts to achieve an illusory equilibrium within them, for they see their challenges, whether personal or professional, as too daunting to mount. As with any other human being, the path of "temporary" least resistance is chosen, leading us to make the outcome far worse than it could of been if we had chosen openness and honesty in our communications.

As an executive coach, I have seen my clients countless times take the risk to share some rather wrenching and/or potentially damaging comments to colleagues, only to experience the resiliency of human nature. Many times, the people around him/her already knew what was going on and waited for him/her to "fess up". Integrity is preserved and respect gained. And these attributes are invaluable to a leader.

No. 5 – Increase in turnover, absenteeism and tardiness

In a personal conversation with the world's expert on employee retention, Leigh Branham told me that he recently looked at 4,000 exit surveys from the Saratoga Institute to glean data as to why employees leave. Interesting finding: 89% of managers think they leave for promotion, pay, or status increase, when 89% of employees *actually* leave for "disengagement" reasons with critical individuals at work. Do you see the self-serving perceptual bias at work?

Executive coaches work with managers to get them to see reality. This is only difficult if we use confrontation as the primary door "in." However, if we match the manager where he/she is at in their perception of their employees who leave and gently guide them to any pattern, that will always be greater than any single "data point."

No. 4 – Performance quotas missed

I once heard a story of a European manager talking to an executive coach about his befuddling experience of his team being 6 months into the fiscal year and way behind in reaching their sales quota. The coach asked him what it would take to close the gap between current performance and desired performance, signifying the successful outcome of what his team was committed to accomplish. He said approximately 2 million pounds. The coach had to rephrase the question, for it was evident that the manager did not understand the significance of the question. The coach restated it as, "What have your team members personally committed to in accomplishing in sales this year?" After a few moments of silence, the manager said, "I have never asked them that." Though this story may seem so simplistic, you would be surprised how many managers assume commitment based on the appeal of the commissions, with no regard to obtaining the optimal idiosyncratic way of motivating each worker with the ultimate goal of aligning personal commitments to the organization's goal.

Executive coaches work with managers to change their "telling" relationship into a more coaching-oriented one where their direct reports naturally thrive and enjoy accountability and success on their own.

No. 3 – Complacency among managers (the "Fine Syndrome")

This important sign to bring an executive coach on board is sometimes missed by senior executives, for the "all is fine" response satisfies executives in many instances. That is, many executives see crucial confrontations as a "bother" and reserved more for Titanic-proportion problems. By then, it is simply too late and the executive uses power and insight maladroitly to add insult on top of injury. Though senior level management is trained to look for performance indicators and bottom line-type inquiries, they sometimes forget the process-oriented pieces that are essential in getting outcomes. When a manager consistently responds with "fine" on many issues, they are usually lazy in some regard and have chosen some shortcuts that have redefined success as "the absence of problems."

Many philosophers, business consultants, and coaches would agree that the absence of evil is not equated to the presence of good or excellence. So don't settle for verbal confirmations that are equivalent to "we are breathing oxygen, so we are fine."

No. 2 – Insanity Defined: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results

This sign is the center of countless bureaucratic meetings where individuals become experts in describing the water while someone is drowning. Business publications don't help this problem for they seem to come out with new terminology that can really hide the fact that a company is really in essence doing the same type of approach to a problem over and over and over again. As long as one talks "optimizing a business model" or "best practice" it's got to be good, right? An executive coach never loses sight of inquiry as a tool. I sometimes will dig for multiple levels of explanation to see how well my client really knows the issue at hand, for it takes a layer or two usually to get past the linguistic illusions. But it is not just businesspeople who get caught in this.

I was boarding a plane for business travel and the ticket agent was asking everyone to comply with the "boarding process." Why "process"? Isn't this unnecessary? Aren't we just being asked to follow the rules to boarding the plane?

No. 1 – You say you don't need one!

Isn't it true that when we think we have it all figured out is just before we get it right between the eyes? This sign is reserved for the CEO who does most of the visionary assessments for how they and the company are doing. The powerful, all-knowing, narcissistic leader typically doesn't call in an executive coach. Yet it is these types of leaders who really need one, but are lost in the "bell curve" where their myopic approach to getting results is temporarily rewarding them. However, if you are a VP or an executive team member for someone like this, executive coaching could really be a powerful, confidential resource to making sure your success is ever-lasting and not a tool for your CEO's ill-fitted ways of validating his or her own success.