



**WHITE PAPER - Seven Success Factors
for Coaching Programs that Get Results**

By Brian Gast, President of Quadrant Corp



Executive Summary

Modern CEOs are facing more pressure from conflicting sources now than ever before. Top organizations realize their leaders not only need a resume with strong education and work experience but also a great degree of maturity and self-awareness to put their knowledge and skills to good use. As a result, more and more organizations are investing in coaching programs. In fact, annual spending on coaching in the United States is estimated at roughly \$1 billion. But the benchmarks defining coaching excellence are still unproven. Corporate clients are reporting frustration with tracking the return on their coaching dollar. In many cases they are wasting their money on programs that yield surface-level results and expecting behavioral changes that are unsustainable.

This is happening because most executive coaching today is focused on superficial skills-training rather than on facilitating fundamental shifts in a leader's self-concept and belief system. Executives and HR professionals who want to hire a coach need criteria on which to evaluate and identify good coaching programs. This whitepaper outlines seven must-have factors for a successful coaching engagement.

To be a CEO today in a top company requires an incredible amount of emotional maturity. A series of interviews with leading UK headhunters has revealed that rather than being a boss, the modern CEO must be an engaging leader¹ who has the trust and ability to inspire groups of very talented people, most of whom consider themselves leaders and don't want to be led.² Not only must CEOs have the people skills to handle a savvy pool of internal employees, they must also win the trust of a wide array of external clients and stakeholders. The revolution in communications technologies and the globalization of the marketplace demand CEOs navigate and respond to increasing and often conflicting pressures.³

Top organizations realize they have to look beyond a strong resume with a Stanford BA, a Harvard MBA and blue-chip work experience to ask "How do we know this person has the maturity and self-awareness to put all this knowledge and experience to good use?"

¹ StrategyOne, "DNA of Leadership," Orange Future Enterprise Coalition Forum, 14 November 2007, Orange Business Services; accessed 18 June 2008, <www.orangecoalition.com/news_and_events>.

² Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, "Leading Clever People," *Harvard Business Review*, March 2007: Harvard Business Publishing, accessed 18 June 2008, <<http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu>>.

³ StrategyOne, op. cit.

To ensure business leaders deliver their personal best, many of the world's most admired corporations, from General Electric to Goldman Sachs, now invest in executive coaching. In fact, annual spending on coaching in the United States is estimated at roughly \$1 billion.⁴

Yet in spite of this large investment in coaching, as Stratford Sherman and Alyssa Freas say in their overview of today's coaching environment, "The essentially human nature of coaching is what makes it work — and also what makes it nearly impossible to quantify."⁵

In a 2003 survey of research on coaching, Dr. Anthony M. Grant at the University of Sydney, Australia, found only 131 peer-reviewed studies about executive coaching published since 1937. Of these, 56 were empirical and the majority of those were uncontrolled group or case studies.⁶ The research is still in its infancy so the benchmarks of what makes a good executive coach are as yet unproven.

As a result, barriers to entry into the coaching field are nonexistent⁷ and self-styled coaches are coming into the profession from all different backgrounds. Many lack the personal depth to take their clients to deeper levels of change and growth.

Corporate clients continue to invest in coaching, but many report frustration with superficial programs that demand unsustainable behavior changes. Clients are also frustrated with their inability to track the return on their coaching dollars. Instead of fostering personal transformation, most coaching programs teach executives new ways to direct other people.

Executives have such a strong focus on outside factors — their company's stakeholders, employees and customers — they often miss the beliefs and dynamics going on inside themselves and how those beliefs influence their external world. It is true for everyone that what happens for us internally will, at some point and in some form, show up externally. When we look internally, we find the blocks, resistance, or that internal voice that says "No." If we don't smooth out those inner knots we will transmit the confusion and pain they create to the external world. As we work out the knots we often tap into more clarity, connection and creativity. To be truly effective, a coaching program must give executives an objective look at themselves and how their perceptions of the workplace and the people in it affect their results. This white paper is intended to help company executives and HR professionals evaluate prospective coaching programs by presenting seven must-have factors for coaching success.

⁴ Stratford Sherman and Alyssa Freas, "The Wild West of Executive Coaching," *Harvard Business Review*, November 2004: Harvard Business Publishing, accessed 18 June 2008 <<http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu>>.

⁵ Ibid.

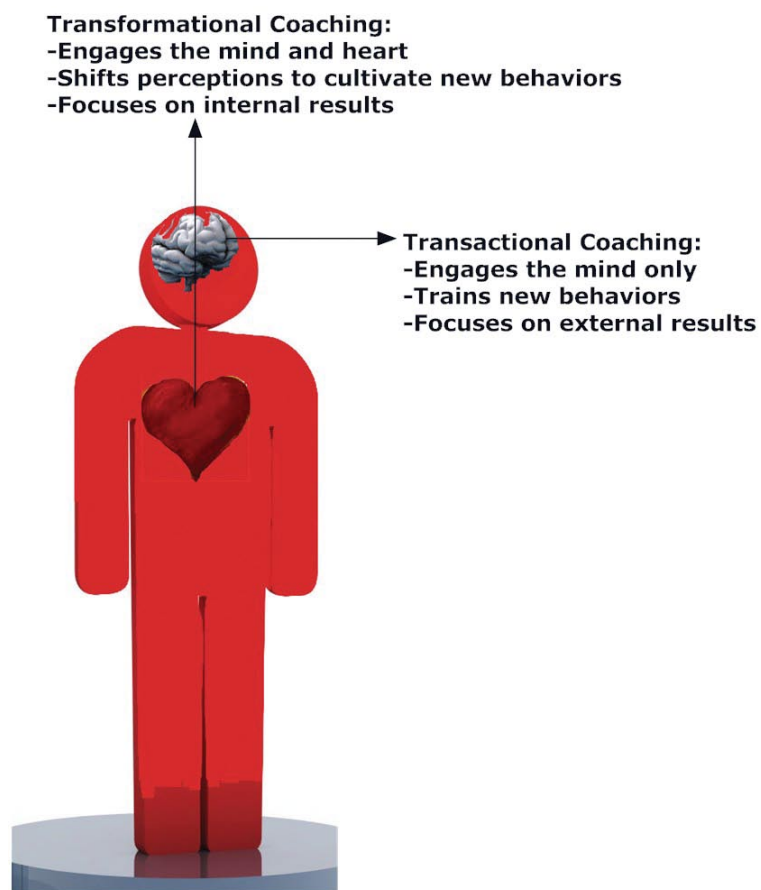
⁶ Anthony M. Grant and Richard Zackon, "Executive, Workplace and Life Coaching: Findings from a Large-Scale Survey of International Coach Federation Members," *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, Vol. 2, No. 2, August 2004, Oxford Brookes University, accessed 18 June 2008, <www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/education/ijebcm/vol2-no2-a-grant.html>.

⁷ Stratford Sherman and Alyssa Freas, "The Wild West of Executive Coaching," *Harvard Business Review*, November 2004: Harvard Business Publishing, accessed 18 June 2008 <<http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu>>.

Success Factor #1: Effective Coaches Inspire Transformational not Transactional Change

Most current coaching models do not facilitate fundamental shifts of consciousness in leaders. James Flaherty, founder of the New Ventures West coach-training firm, says most corporate coaching is transactional rather than transformational.

Transactional coaching provides skill development, awareness of behavior and associated behavior modification. But these benefits are superficial.



The deeper work of transformational coaching involves changes in a person's belief systems, changes in the way they make meaning from events, and changes in their self-concept. Rather than training people to simply act differently, an effective coaching program focuses on changing their perceptions. Successful coaching shines a light on the shadow sides of the leader — the parts of their own behavior they do not see or understand but that have a powerful impact on their leadership effectiveness. In this way, a truly effective coaching program helps increase a leader's maturity level so they make authentic choices that create more sustainable, lasting change.

Success Factor #2: Effective Coaches Establish Trust

Effective coaching is transformational and involves processes that change the way people perceive themselves and others. Building trust with clients is critical in allowing them to access and expose their inner lives — that level of consciousness that drives their belief systems.

Trust should not be confused with credibility although the two are related. A coach's background, education, and client list all help build credibility, but not necessarily trust. Credibility is important to the process of selecting and initially connecting with a coach but it quickly gives way to the real question, "Can this person help me get to the next level of effectiveness?"

Trust is not about content, for example, a resume. Trust is about a process, for example, a coach's willingness to be vulnerable and direct. Trust is not about some unspoken agreement that the coach is going to be gentle or nice. Trust exists because everyone is committed to using the coaching tools and processes to get to the deeper truth.

A trusting relationship is not magic. It is a result of the personal growth work done by effective coaches. The work they've done and the self-discoveries they've made give them the self-mastery and confidence to navigate clients across their own inner landscapes.

Establishing trust also involves defining the relationship the coach has with the coachee and the coachee's upper management. We see too many coaches mistrusted from the outset because they have aligned themselves too closely with the upper management.

It is critical to structure the confidentiality of an engagement to prohibit the feeding back of any details from a coaching session to a boss. This is done by focusing reports exclusively on the executive's growth and progress toward their goals.

Success Factor #3: Effective Coaches Take Time

An effective coaching program is spread over a period of time and tackles live issues facing a client. Meetings can be in person or over the phone in combination with less frequent face-to-face meetings. The key to success is to not let more than two weeks pass between coaching sessions. Coaches should also be ready to schedule impromptu meetings or calls as needed.

In an effective coaching program, there is enough time allocated to integrate new behavior in the real world. Therefore, a coaching program should last from six to twelve months. In general, although not always the case, the more senior the executive is, the longer the engagement. This is due to the complexity of the issues involved and a company's ability to justify the investment. Coaching that lasts less than six months does not allow enough time for real, sustainable change to happen.

Ingredient #4: Effective Coaches Work with People Who are Ready and Committed

Before launching a program, an effective coach will first assess whether the engagement is positioned for success. How coach-able is the executive? Are there environmental factors that will derail the coaching process?

The following factors help determine coach-ability:

- **ENVIRONMENT:** Is the client so focused on survival that personal development will take a back seat? Factors such as financial problems, depression, health problems, travel demands, or heavy deadlines will likely have the client fighting for survival. In this environment, an executive needs support in the form of friends, life coaching, therapy or a financial re-engineering specialist, but not a coach engaged to work on leadership effectiveness.

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL STRUGGLES NOT A TIME TO START COACHING

At Quadrant Corp., we recently began an engagement with the president of a hotel management company that was experiencing high turnover at the senior-team level and had not hit its operating budget for the past three consecutive years.

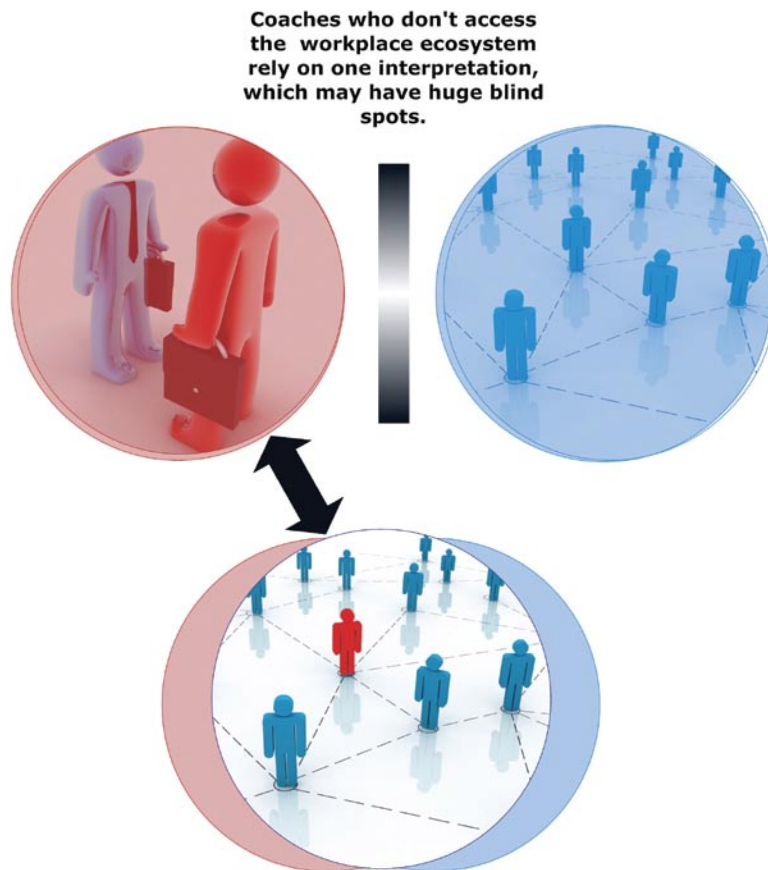
We found the client, as one of the partners in the firm, was under severe financial pressure related to a number of the company's other real-estate investments. The executive himself was also in the midst of a divorce proceeding. He needed support, but a leadership development coaching process was not going to get much attention.

We decided to wait six months until things settled down before launching the engagement.

-
- **SUPPORT:** Does the client have the support of upper management and is there enough support among peers and direct reports? There may be some broken relationships. These are often either salvageable or not critical to the goal of increased effectiveness. But a coaching engagement is dead on arrival if key people have written off an executive to such a degree that no change will be acknowledged.
 - **COMMITMENT:** Coach-ability is also a function of a client's humility and authentic commitment to his or her own personal growth. While we find most high-potential or high-achieving executives have these traits, we sometimes come across executives that have blind spots that are too big to allow the coaching process to work. Often these leaders have not experienced failure, personal crisis or have not had enough life experiences to be open to learning — it's not a priority. They may very well be an accident waiting to happen, but this does not mean coaching is going to work for them. Extreme arrogance, self-centeredness, or avoidance can be blocks that limit the effectiveness of any coaching program.

Success Factor #5: Effective Coaches Engage the Work Ecosystem

In times past, when coaching was sometimes perceived as a sign of weakness, it was often done on the side, like going to psychotherapy. The result was the executive did some growth work, but the coach did not have access to those who worked with the client. It was like coaching a baseball pitcher without ever having seen him pitch.



It is essential to engage the coachee's stakeholders in the coaching process as early as possible. While the process of direct feedback from bosses, peers and direct reports can bring up feelings of insecurity, not having it leaves the data collection process unduly influenced by the coachee.

Without a clear understanding of the core behaviors that are causing sub-par results or unintended consequences in the coachee's relationships, the coaching process gets off to an inefficient or even a wrongheaded start.

A key tool that effective coaches use prior to a first session is a 360-degree survey. This identifies specific skills and compares the coachee's self-perception to that of his or her co-workers. The respondents typically include 10 to 12 people — one or two bosses, two or three peers, four to six direct reports, and a few in the "other" category, including major customers, suppliers, etc. The 360-degree survey should also compare these scores to the norm among a large population of other leaders in comparable positions.

Along with a 360-degree review, more in-depth interviews of a subset of the respondents will give even richer information. These interviews can be in person or by phone and should last about 45 minutes.

The interview questions should be designed to get a sense of the impact coachees have on other people, the nature of their relationships, their strong skills and areas where development is needed. Results should be compiled in a way that highlights themes and captures examples without attributing comments to particular individuals. In fact, a coach should go to great lengths to mask the identity of the interviewees.

In addition, 360-degree surveys and interviews play another important role. They put key members of the client's ecosystem on notice that the client is on a path of change. These processes invite candid input and may even inspire colleagues to follow the coachee's example.

The interview process also allows coaches to develop some direct relationships with those they are interviewing. An effective coach may check in with interviewees at various times during the engagement to collect more "live" data related to how the coachee is doing while on the job.

THE ART OF INTERPRETING FEEDBACK

One of the most important skills a coach brings to an engagement is the ability to interpret feedback. For example, at Quadrant, one of our clients demonstrated empathetic and active listening skills, appeared very present when others were talking and never interrupted. Yet his 360 feedback results showed a low score on "listening."

During interviews, his staff complained that their suggestions were not being acted on. So the client was listening but he was not telling his team when he disagreed with certain suggestions they made and not communicating how he was making decisions. His real issue was "avoidance" because he was not expressing his disagreement and this showed up in the survey as "not listening."

Success Factor #6: Effective Coaches Work with Well-Crafted Goals

Coaching works only if coachees are clear about the results they want to see from the coaching process and make note of this for themselves, those in their ecosystem, and their coaches. Development plans that reflect a laundry list of items or that try to tackle too many core behavioral changes are positioned for failure. We recommend setting one or two clear and focused goals for every six months of coaching. These goals can have several sub-objectives and action items and should flow directly from the results of the 360-degree feedback and stakeholder interviews.

Coaches must distill down the results of the feedback and combine this with their own observations of their clients. This allows coaches to guide coachees as they take in the feedback, process it to understand how their perceptions influence their behavior, and determine their most important priority.

Below are two examples of coaching program goals. As you can see, these goals are focused yet very rich in content. Notice how they are written as affirmative statements as though the behavior has already occurred. This puts the attention on positive action, allows everyone to track the desired behavior, and helps reduce the temptation to hold onto less effective behavior. Although there is some detail behind these main goals, it is important to ask clients to share a descriptor that is less than 10 words long to anchor the goal in everyone's consciousness.

If a company has prepared written competencies and wants to tie the goals to them, it is fine to encourage this, as long as the goals are clear, universally understood, and progress toward them can be measured.

SAMPLE EXECUTIVE COACHING GOALS

I EFFECTIVELY SURFACE AND MANAGE CONFLICT — I address tension, misalignment or disconnection with others on a timely basis and turn conflict into deeper connections where possible. I use tools for self-understanding to be empathetic and enforce boundaries. I hold myself and others accountable for their actions and commitments.

I AM A TRUSTED LEADER AND TEAMMATE — I make and keep clear agreements, my motives are transparent, I appropriately yet fully disclose data that is influencing my choices, and, where appropriate, I let others see my vulnerability in order to build stronger relationships. People know I am committed to what I say and my words and energy are congruent.

Ingredient #7: Effective Coaches Establish a Coaching Team and Checkpoints

Just as it is important to set clear goals, it is also important to make sure key managers, board members and HR professionals are included in the coaching process. Their buy-in to the goals and process becomes a model of encouragement for others in the workplace. To achieve this goal, they should also receive coaching on how they can support change in the coachee and how to encourage others to do the same. An effective coaching program includes three checkpoint meetings of this team every six months.

- The first is to confirm that the goals are clear and cover the best priorities for the coachee. This is often a good time for everyone to disclose what they are working on to build empathy and mutual support in this process of continuous learning and improvement.
- The second meeting happens at the three-month mark. The team talks about the coachee's progress and the feedback they are getting from others regarding the coachee. Then they refine the goals for the next three months. This is a wonderful opportunity to anchor-in any positive changes that have been made and let old issues, conflicts, and behaviors be left in the past.
- The third meeting is at the completion of the coaching program. The team talks about the coachee's commitments for the future, any further coaching if needed, and related goals.

Each of these meetings should be lead by the coachee. The meetings should open with the coachee's self-assessment of progress toward his or her goals and where things should go in the future. He or she then asks for specific feedback — positive and developmental — from other participants. The coach then offers his or her assessment of progress and then makes suggestions on how the coachee's teammates can support further change or integration of new behaviors.

CONCLUSION

This white paper has outlined the seven most important factors for a successful coaching engagement. We've arranged them below in a convenient checklist and recommend you use them when evaluating prospective coaches and coaching programs.

Does my coaching program include the following:	Yes	No
transformational not transactional methods;		
an appropriate amount of time;		
people who are ready and committed;		
well-established trust;		
an engagement with the work ecosystem;		
well-crafted goals;		
a coaching team and checkpoints?		

Quadrant believes internal change is necessary for external results and offers coaching for executives who want to optimize their leadership effectiveness and for those who are navigating personal or professional transitions. We also help business teams become more aligned. For a detailed outline of our coaching process visit our Web site at www.quadcoach.com.

Brian Gast

Brian Gast launched Quadrant Corp in 2001 after meeting other corporate leaders like himself who were looking for something more than the typical weekend or week-long training workshops. Quadrant provides individual coaching and team facilitation to clients who range from those on the Fortune 1000 — such as Roche Pharmaceuticals, Cisco Systems Inc., and The Walt Disney Company — to mid-sized, regional companies. Through its relationship with YPO-WPO (previously Young Presidents' Organization), an organization for men and women who find themselves in the CEO chair before the age of 40, Quadrant works with high-achieving mid-life executives navigating personal and professional transitions.

Before founding Quadrant, Brian helped co-found a publicly traded telecom services company. He was CEO of this company for more than seven years. After this success, he went on to co-found and lead two other companies. This personal experience has proven invaluable to the coaching techniques and approaches Quadrant's coaches provide today.

Brian now dedicates his life to bridging the gap between the world of personal growth and the highly demanding professional world business leaders live in today. In total, he has worked for over 20 years in executive positions in a number of companies and studied leadership for over 30 years.





Learn more...

To learn more about Quadrant's clients, Associate Coaches, and program offerings visit www.quadcoach.com. You may also want to call Brian Gast today to do a side-by-side comparison on your current coaching processes and Quadrant's approach.

If you would like to speak directly with Brian, call (303) 707-1340 or email him at bgast@quadcoach.com.