

COMPANIES ARE HIRING COACHES TO
TEACH EXECUTIVES HOW TO SHARPEN
MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND
COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY
LEADING THE CORPORATE LEAGUE

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When an executive coach suggested that Bob Garland change his speaking style, the senior manager for Deloitte & Touche was taken aback. The idea that a veteran with his experience needed to liven up his onstage presence seemed preposterous.

"Why should I have to do that?" Garland wondered. "I'm a good speaker already. I've given 300 to 400 speeches over the last 20 years."

But the national managing partner of assurance and advisory services changed his mind after a role playing session with coach Kathy Lubar, cofounder of The Ariel Group in Cambridge. By working with Lubar he realized how cerebral his speeches were and, well, downright boring.

A year later, Garland is both a better speaker and a convert: He now requires that his management committee participate in coaching sessions to learn how to communicate more effectively with their staffs and prospective clients.

Teaching company brass how to loosen up and be more human is not the only reason companies turn to executive coaches. Employers are also retaining coaches to assist with everything from pre-IPO roadshow presentations to helping despotic managers with potential control themselves and their tempers.

Coaching is now often a prerequisite to promotion, an intense leadership training course for talented people who need assistance smoothing a few rough edges. Typically, the coachee is a chief executive, a division head, or a highly regarded employee earning a minimum of \$100,000 to \$250,000 per year.

"Employers are really seeking to sharpen the leadership skills of high potential individuals," said Betty Bailey, practice leader and senior vice president of the New England division of Manchester Consulting. "So, they are hiring individuals to head executive development. This person is in charge of helping to create the next leader."

When Manchester Consulting surveyed 200 companies this year, it found that 59 percent offer coaching to managers and top executives, up from about 29 percent a decade ago. Eighty-six percent hired a coach to sharpen the leadership skills of high potential employees, 72 percent used one to correct behavior problems that interfered with performance, 64 percent wanted to ensure the success of newly promoted managers, and 58 percent wanted to

help technical employees gain the leadership skills needed to work with a broad range of people and issues.

Many coaches hold degrees in business management, or industrial psychology, but not all. Ariel Group's Lubar and her cofounder, Belle Linda Halpern, are trained actors who teach buttoned-down executives how to relax, tune in to their emotions, and become more at ease socially.

"Some people are born with the desire to be big, to be seen and noticed," Halpern said. "They have natural charisma. Others are bombastic and take up too much space. We believe presence can be developed, and we believe that there is a way to make other people feel listened to and heard."

The Ariel Group charges \$12,000 for a two-day coaching program, with two facilitators, or \$1,500 per month to coach an individual for an hour each week. The company also sends individual coaches to special events where they help executives prepare for special presentations and combat stage fright.

Lubar recently worked with a woman who was terrified of speaking in public, but public speaking was a part of her job. The client insisted that Lubar sit backstage with her. "We worked on breathing techniques and did basic meditation and deep breathing," Lubar said. "We also worked on visualization, and I suggested that she imagine being in good hands."

Not all executives are eager to be coached. Deloitte & Touche's Garland was skeptical about changing his speaking style - until he saw himself in action.

"Bob Garland was a pretty dry speaker," recalled Lubar. "He was an accountant and auditor, very numbers-oriented, very blunt. And he spoke in a monotone, with no drama or flare.

"At the same time, he was very confident and comfortable with himself. So, I encouraged him to tell stories about his family, to use props and metaphors. We prepared by doing Shakespeare, by role-playing and improvising."

The technique worked. Garland, whose firm grades its managers on their presentations on a scale of one to six, had routinely garnered a four. Now, he says, his ratings are higher.

"I thought I was a good speaker," Garland said. "Now, I realize that was not the case at all. What I've learned is that only 15 percent of an effective speech is content-related. The rest is delivery, style, and emotional involvement."

More companies are also hiring coaches to help managers cope with difficult employees, maintains Mel Epstein, founder of Leverage Thinking, a management consulting firm in Cambridge.

Ten years ago, such workers were cast adrift in the first wave of layoffs. Nowadays, with unemployment hovering at 2.4 percent in Massachusetts, employers are more interested in ironing out conflicts than handing out pink

slips, Epstein said.

"Coaches are in demand," he noted. "Paradoxically, greater skills are required from managers because of the economy. Companies want to hold onto people, not lose them. So, managers who can work with problem employees are valued and coaches are being hired to help develop those skills."

SIDEBAR:

TIPS FROM THE PROS

How do you prepare for an important meeting? Give a memorable speech? A few tips from the experts:

If scheduled to give a speech, rehearse out loud and use a tape recorder whenever possible. Start your speech with a personal story, something the audience can identify with. Make sure the story is relevant to the broader points you plan to make in your speech.

Whether you are giving a speech or simply meeting in a conference room, always make eye contact. If you are speaking to a crowd of 800, pick out one person in the audience and make eye contact or look directly at him or her. Others will feel as if you have connected with them, too.

If giving a speech, try not to use the podium. Instead, rely on a prop: a chair, charts, an overhead screen. Walk around the stage, gesture, use your body - not the podium.

Every one has presence. Conveying who you are becomes less difficult when you have a clear grasp of your values, interests, and needs.

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