Readers Weigh In On Coaches, Crazy Colleagues
Job-hoppers created this market. They ought not to whine about its consequences.
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By Anne Fisher

Who needs an executive coach? Maybe you do--whether you know it or not. Many thanks to all who wrote to comment on the Feb. 19 column (Executive Coaching With Returns a CFO Could Love), wherein the benefits of one-on-one training were quantified in actual dollars and cents. "I went into the coaching experience kicking and screaming, at the insistence of my then-boss," recalls a reader named Steve. "And what an eye-opener it turned out to be. I won't even go into the grim details of bad management habits I had unthinkingly developed in my 14-year career up to that point--but I will say that since I was 'cured' by 12 weeks of pretty intensive coaching, I've been promoted three times." According to Kevin Bourne at Ceridian Lifeworks Services (ceridian.com), that's not surprising. One Ceridian client, a huge global services company, offered coaching to 127 senior managers and then studied the results. The executives turned out to score higher than their coachless colleagues on a long list of attributes, including "results obtained," "builds relationships," and "applies integrative thinking." Think you might want to find your own personal guru? Here's that Web address again: The American Society for Training and Development at www.astd.org (click on Buyer's Guide). Or check out the International Coach Federation at www.coachfederation.com .

And speaking of sharpening your skills, a few more words on the certification needed to switch to a tech career (May 14) from Randy Schultz at Sun Microsystems, who says that the number of people getting Java training from the company has shot up "several hundred percent" in the past year: One widespread complaint about computer certification, be it Novell, Microsoft, or Java, is that too often the sheepskin won't get you a job (or even, I hear, an interview) if you have no hands-on experience. Sun is trying to tackle the problem by offering what Schultz calls "job-role-based" training. This means, for example, that a Sun-certified network administrator has gained enough practical experience by graduation day to qualify for an actual job as a network administrator. Cool. Right now, the company is going several steps further by offering advanced Java programming (in addition to the basic training that will get you Java-certified), as well as a whole bunch of specific certifications in hot skills like Web component design. For information, see www.sun.com/service/suned/USA/certification.

Now, about that April 16 column, [Colleagues Driving You Crazy? You Might Be the Problem](). I didn't mean to imply that there's no such animal as a truly wacky colleague--and, boy, have you been telling me all about them, more than enough hair-raising tales to fill several columns. Listen to this, from an architect named Frank, who has studied psychology in an attempt to understand what's eating the people he works with: "The most difficult and abusive [co-workers] all have some form of adult personality disorder. The two most common I have run across are narcissistic personality disorder (vicious, raging, self-centered dictators) and borderline personality disorder (fire and ice). My profession also seems to attract a fair number of people with obsessive-compulsive disorder. The higher up in the organization these people are, the worse they get, because there are fewer restraints on their behavior." Well, what can I say? If this sounds familiar, start looking for a new job. Life's too short.

And finally, on the topic of employers who refuse to train computer programmers and then complain that they can't find enough skilled people ([March 5]()), let's hear from the management side of the table. Writes John Brendel, a managing director at iGATE Capital: "Do not be so sure that the 'same-skill mindset' [bemoaned by many programmers] is a creation of poor management. Rather, it could be an appropriate response of hiring managers to the 'free agent' mentality of so many programmers, who will switch jobs for as little as a 2% salary increase. When an employer trains an employee in a particular technical skill, the market value of the programmer immediately goes up by 5 to 10%. If that programmer then quits to go to a competitor, that training is wasted and counterproductive.... In a 'free agent' market, the onus [to get the latest technical skills] is on the programmer, not the employer. It's unrealistic to expect companies to play the role of free universities. Job-hopping programmers created this market. They ought not to whine about its consequences." Noted.

Next time: Insights from readers who've been there on how to lay people off without sinking, oneself, into a slough of despond ([May 28]()). As always, thanks, everybody--and keep those e-mails coming!