

Becoming An Executive Coachee: Creating Learning Partnerships

By Michael Carroll & Maria Gilbert

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Declaration Of Executive Coachee Rights

As an executive coachee, you have the right to:

1. Be respected for being a professional.
2. Become the professional you can be (and not a clone of your coach).
3. A confidential setting where you feel safe to share what you need to.
4. A healthy coaching relationship with professional boundaries.
5. Fair and honest evaluations and reports.
6. See your coach's reports on you with opportunity to comment on the contents.
7. Know what your coach thinks of you and your work.
8. Make good any areas of development outlined by your coach.
9. Clear and focused feedback from your executive coach.
10. Give clear and focused feedback to your coach.
11. Ongoing, regular and systematic reviews of the coaching arrangement.
12. Learn in a way that suits your particular learning style.
13. Negotiate the coaching contract(s) (and knowing, in advance, what is nonnegotiable in the contract).
14. Mediation should the coaching relationship break down.
15. Appeal against decisions made in coaching with which you have problems.
16. Know and be part of any decisions made by your organization and your coach.

Declaration Of Executive Coachee Responsibilities

As an executive coachee, you have responsibility for/to:

1. Your own learning.
2. Preparing for coaching.
3. Using coaching time effectively (managing time boundaries).
4. Presenting yourself and your work openly and honestly.
5. Delivering the best service possible to your organization.
6. Creating learning partnerships with your coach and your organization.
7. Applying learning from your coaching to your performance at work.
8. Being aware of other stakeholders in the coaching arrangements eg., the team you work in, your organization, professional bodies.
9. Monitoring and evaluating your own work.
10. Reflecting on your work.
11. Feedback to yourself and to others (eg., your organization).
12. Being aware of cultural, religious, racial and sexual orientation differences between you and others.

Why This Manual?

There is a deluge of books on executive coaching and many of them, most of them indeed, are written for executive coaches. There is almost nothing for the executive coachee (the person receiving coaching). Coaching from the perspective of the coachee is, by and large, left to chance. This point has been made recently, “Looking at the literature and research on coaching, it is noticeable that while there is a considerable amount of emphasis placed on the skills of the coach, there seems to be less focus on the skills that a client needs for the coaching to be effective” (Stokes, 2007). This manual hopes to change that and offer coachees a systematic and organized approach to becoming an effective coachee – ie. becoming a partner in a learning journey and not simply the passive recipient of coaching services.

We do not particularly like the word “coachee” but other terms such as “client” or even worse “patient” detract from the role of being the partner in a formal executive coaching relationship. So we are left with “executive coachee” until a better term comes along.

...We have chosen to write this manual specifically for executive coachees...

We have chosen to write this manual specifically for executive coachees. We are very aware of other forms of coaching particularly life coaching. We know also of team coaching, peer coaching and of course, the manager as coach. While many aspects of this manual will pertain to coachees in those various relationships and settings, we thought it would overcomplicate our task (and the focus of executive coachees) to try to be all inclusive and see coachees as similar across all aspects of coaching. This is not the case and the tasks, roles, relationships and focus points of different types of coaching differ. Life coaching rarely has an organization that pays the coach and which has an agenda for the executive coachee. Managerial coaching clearly has responsibilities that go well beyond the responsibilities of external coaches. For these reasons, we narrow our attention to executive coachees.

The focus of executive coaching is learning. Later in this manual we will look at the various kinds of learning which are the field of executive coaching. Within the coaching arrangements and relationship, coachees learn in order to give better quality service to their organization (company, organization, firm, and institute). Effective executive coaches are facilitators or providers of learning. They aim to create the kind of collaborative relationship and the sort of learning environment that sustains learning for coachees. Coaching is for coachees, not for coaches. Too often we have had to put up with coach-based executive coaching where coaches take most of the initiatives, are motivated by their own current hobby horses, dazzle with their wisdom and insights and take the spotlight off coachees. This manual aims to empower coachees to take responsibility for their coaching and for their learning and to persuade coaches and organizations that pay for coaching to allow them to do so.

This manual is primarily for executive coachees. We consider a coachee to be anyone, of any profession, who is the recipient of a coaching arrangement where the focus of the coaching work is the professional development of the executive.

It is still rare for coachees to receive help and instruction in being effective coachees. There is little literature to which coachees can turn that is written specifically for them to help them make sense of, understand and be a collaborative partner in the coaching arrangement, either one to one or in a group/team.

Hence this manual. For coachees (and for coaches and supervisors of coaches who want to know about being coachees), it will lead you through the various stages of

understanding, setting up, contracting for, maintaining and ending a coaching relationship. In “Training Supervisees how to Use Supervision”, Inskipp (1999) suggests three reasons for concentrating on supervisees – we apply these same reasons to coachees:

1. To empower executive coachees.
2. To help coachees to be open and honest in what they bring to their executive coaching sessions (coaches can only work with what is brought to them).
3. To involve coachees actively in all aspects of executive coaching so creating a collaborative learning relationship. To do this coachees need skills, knowledge and practical ways of fulfilling their roles and responsibilities (Inskipp, 1999).

...while primarily for beginner coachees, this manual will also assist those who have been coached before...

Our hope is that executive coaches will give coachees this manual for the above reasons and also because there is not enough time spent on helping coachees use coaching effectively either on training courses or within coaching itself. However, while primarily for beginner coachees, this manual will also assist those who have been coached before. Indeed experienced coachees might find it helpful to review how they take part in the coaching relationship and help them look again at the various processes involved. It is too easy for all of us, no matter how experienced, to follow meaningless routines in our work no matter what our profession. Executive coaching interrupts our work (and sometimes our mindlessness) in order to help us reflect on it and thereby, do it differently and better. Executive coaching is as much about creativity as it is about skills and competencies. This manual will provide a springboard for discussion (it cannot be an end in itself) between/amongst coachees and coaches so that they end up with the same understanding of coaching and can be invested in the same coaching outcomes.

Reading The Manual: Making It Work For You

This manual is not intended to be read straight through from beginning to end. Different sections of it will be of help at different times in a coachee’s life. We have divided the manual into three sections to make it more accessible. Section 1 is for beginning executive coachees who may well be thinking about executive coaching for the first time and entering their first coaching arrangements. It contains the basics of understanding coaching and being involved in choosing an executive coach (though some coachees do not have that choice) as well as contracting and preparing for coaching. Section 2 contains material more applicable and of use to those who have begun their executive coaching and have in place those elements discussed in Section 1. From the strength of a healthy coaching relationship, they can now look to other elements within coaching to enhance their learning of secondary skills (learning about developmental stages in coaching, learning about “drivers” and about developing emotional literacy skills amongst others). Section 3 is an Appendix which includes a number of exercises and frameworks to help executive coachees as they move forward in their coaching journey. Choose whichever suits you and makes sense at your stage of being a coachee.

While this book is intended as a guide to facilitate executive coaches to be part of the coaching process, there are a number of areas that it will not consider. Not because these areas are not important – some of them are crucial to the effectiveness of executive coaching – but because they may or may not be of direct concern to you, the coachee. However, we have no way of knowing which aspects of the big picture of executive coaching are your direct concern and which are not, so here are a few pointers to further information and reading if they concern you:

1. Why coaching is so popular today and the influences on coaching as a viable and effective intervention (see Jarvis, Lane and Fillery-Travis, 2006: Chapter 1).
2. Does Coaching work? Looking at the research evidence (see Jarvis, Lane and Fillery-Travis, 2006: chapter 4; Passmore and Gibbes, 2007: The state of Executive Coaching Research: What does the current literature tell us?) There are two further summaries for those interested in up to date research on the effectiveness of executive coaching: Chapter 4 in the Handbook of Coaching Psychology (2007) and “Advances in research in Coaching Outcomes” (Grief, 2007).
3. Coaching surveys looking at the percentage of organizations using coaching, why organizations use coaching, what is involved in the delivery of coaching, does coaching work, the benefits of coaching (CIPD, Training and Development Survey Reports, 2004, 2005, 2006).
4. Making Coaching Work: Creating a Coaching Culture (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2005).
5. Coaching and Buying Coaching Services (Jarvis, CIPD, 2004)
6. Team Coaching (Clutterbuck, 2007).

While this manual hopes to “empower” executive coachees in all aspects of their coaching arrangements, we are all too aware that some executive coaches and some organizations will not be coachee focused. Quite the opposite, in our experience. There are coaches who see little point in “negotiating” with coachees and will consider it their task to tell coachees what executive coaching is and how they (coachees) should involve themselves in it. They fit coachees to their models and theories rather than consider which models and theories best apply to this individual. Some hierarchical-based organizations will have little interest in setting up “learning partnerships” but will work on the expert-beginner model of executive coaching ie., that it is the task of executive coaches to tell coachees how to do their work and guide and monitor that work often concentrating on articulating weaknesses as a way of progressing personal and professional development. We do not want to put coachees in a “no-win” situation, pretending that they will be partners in a learning endeavour when there is little chance of that happening. Having said that, we want to outline an understanding of executive coaching that, in our view, is based on solid principles of adult learning and will add value to both coachees and their organizations while making executive coaching a much more interesting engagement for coaches.

...Executive Coaching exists to support the personal and professional learning of executive coachees...

Executive Coaching exists to support the personal and professional learning of executive coachees and, thereby contribute to the goals of their organizations (we repeat from above). Part of that learning is about accountability. Coaching is a process that offers accountability or responsibility to whoever (professions, authorities, managers, organizations, tax payers, managers, investors etc) that coachees take their work seriously enough to set up a reflective space where they review that work, learn from it and apply that learning when they return to it. Eventually, they will become reflective practitioners who reflect-in-action (think about the work as they do the work) and move towards being full time self learners.

Connor and Pokora (2007) are two of the few authors who devote time to helping coachees use coaching to best effect. Chapter 3 in their book is entitled “How can I be an effective client?” and the summary of their chapter is worth remembering as a fine guide about what to keep in mind in order to get the best from your executive coaching.

1. “Getting the right coach or mentor”.
2. “Knowing yourself”.
3. “Having realistic expectations”.
4. “Negotiating a working agreement”.
5. “Thinking ahead and being strategic”.

6. "Being proactive".
7. "Learning from support and challenge".
8. "Using reflective space".
9. "Developing your imagination".
10. "Identifying your resources and working smart".
11. "Setting goals and making action plans".
12. "Developing skills, making changes and delivering results".

(Connor and Pokora, 2007:54).