

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Internal Coaching

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A popular trend in executive coaching is the development of a team of coaches within the organization – individuals who have other jobs, often within human resources and sometimes in leadership positions, who take on the added responsibility of coaching one or more executives.

Aside from being less expensive than external coaches, internal coaches have the advantage of already understanding the organization's business issues and internal dynamics. They are generally aware of the executive's context: his or her pressures, opportunities, etc., and they speak the language of the organization. Also, if they have leadership experience in the organization, they may find it easier to gain the respect of the executive and build rapport.

On the other hand, internal coaches usually have less coaching and feedback experience than external coaches, with fewer opportunities to practice and maintain their coaching skills. They may lack a cross-organizational perspective that would allow them to put the executive's behavior in the context of what is normal and healthy in other organizations (the internal coach may be "blinded" by their experience in the company). They may perceive the coaching assignment to be less important than the other work they need to do, and have less time available for coaching. Because they often lack relevant professional training, internal coaches may miss signs of depression, substance abuse, marital decline, and so on.

*Compared to external coaches, internal coaches usually have less coaching and feedback experience overall, and fewer opportunities to practice and maintain their coaching skills.*

Also, if the executive has some authority over the internal coach, the coach may be less inclined to confront serious issues. If the coach is at a lower level in the organizational hierarchy, the executive may be less inclined to seriously consider the suggestions and guidance of the coach. Finally, because the internal coach has other responsibilities and allegiances within the organization, the executive may have less confidence that the issues discussed in the coaching meetings will remain entirely confidential.

Because of these drawbacks, it is advisable to approach the development of an internal cadre of coaches carefully, with limited expectations. Internal coaches need training on feedback tools, coaching techniques and a recommended coaching process. They also need clear guidelines for maintaining confidentiality, handling sensitive issues, and so on. And they need to be given the authority to invest the necessary time to prepare for and conduct the coaching meetings.

