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Today's business culture no longer allows for supervisors or employees who want to do the same thing in the same way with the same people for years on end. It's vital that you have the ability to foresee, adapt to and drive change in order to take advantage of the best opportunities. Executive coaching can make the difference.

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Campaign Kicks Off
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Put Me In, Coach

Executive Coaching Brings Out The Winning Edge

By Elaine C. Cole

Can you imagine being in the same job, doing the same thing, for 25 years? How about 15? Or even 5? Once, this was the norm. But today's business culture no longer allows for supervisors or employees who want to do the same thing in the same way with the same people for years on end.

Today's fast-paced marketplace requires people who think beyond immediate concerns to look at future possibilities.

Scott Klososky, a technology-focused entrepreneur, author, speaker and consultant, told Neeley students that business leaders need to learn better skills to predict the future.

"We all have the same types of technology available to us," he said. "The same benefits are really available to everyone, even on a budget. It's just that some people look at what's going on out there and can do magic things, while some people look at what's going on out there and can't do anything at all."

Whether you are the CEO, vice president, supervisor, manager or associate, it is vital that you have the ability to foresee, adapt to and, indeed, drive change in order to take advantage of the best opportunities.

"Many points in our jobs and careers require, even demand, changes in our leadership behaviors, competencies, attitudes, and thinking," said Christine Riordan, associate dean for external relations at the Neeley School. "How well we navigate these potentially treacherous junctures often determines our ultimate success – or failure – as leaders."

How Well Do You Navigate Change?

How does a person learn to navigate change? Through experience, yes. But increasingly, top executives are turning to a new style of personalized leadership development called executive coaching.

According to *The Sherpa Guide: Process-Driven Executive Coaching*, the definition of executive coaching is: "regular meetings between a business leader and a trained facilitator, designed to produce positive changes in business behavior in a limited time frame."

Executive coaches themselves are usually either employees of an organization who provide services to colleagues, or independent service providers. Most organizations use a combination of the two. One in ten relies exclusively on external coaches, according to the 2008 Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey.

Once thought of as a means to correct office behavior or assist with career choices, executive coaching has evolved to a pro-active move to develop peak performance through leadership skills. Where once there may have been a stigma to receiving executive coaching, now there is a certain status involved.

The Tandy Center for Executive Leadership, located within the Neeley School, provides highly regarded executive coaching aimed at developing leadership skills, enhancing performance and championing success in senior-level executives and high-potential employees. These one-on-one coaching and assessment sessions are ideal for professionals who desire personalized business development and a head start to the corner office.

Most executive coaching is aimed at senior managers and executives who have a high level of authority and responsibility. Other professionals – including lawyers, doctors, architects, and entrepreneurs of growing businesses – also engage the services of executive coaches to help them achieve personal and professional goals.

The high-level professionals in Neeley's Executive MBA classes receive coaching from professional coaches. At first cautious because of another coaching experience he had that was

not rewarding, Tom Carney, a member of Neeley EMBA class, had nothing but praise for the Neeley program.

“I got a number of valuable lessons from the coaching program: 1) A better understanding that I must manage my behaviors like I manage a project; set an objective and then measure progress on a periodic basis. I was doing the first part but not following through enough on the second part. 2) Continuous improvement should apply to personal traits and habits. Improvement starts with the goal, the plan, and the status of accomplishment toward the goal,” said Carney.

He also said that he benefited from someone who was there to help establish a plan and keep him on track accomplishing the plan; someone he could talk with about almost anything: school, work, family, social activities. “My executive coach became a resource and a friend,” he said.

The executive coaching plan, initiated in fall 2007, aims to help the EMBA students develop and implement a leadership plan with the aid of 360-degree feedback.

“It’s not about career counseling or how to find a better job,” said Robert Gatewood, executive director for Neeley’s EMBA program. “The executive coaching that we provide to our EMBA students focuses on increasing their awareness and developing leadership skills.”

“One of the benefits of executive coaching is that it gives busy professionals the means to discover any weaknesses they may have, the forum to correct those weaknesses, and the coach to help them develop a plan for ongoing success,” said Brenda Daraiseh, associate director of Neeley’s Executive MBA program and a certified Sherpa coach.

According to Riordan, leaders often cling to the

past or continue business as usual. “They think that past behaviors of success will carry them into the future, yet one style of behaviors rarely moves a person seamlessly throughout his or her leadership career,” she said.

“Executive coaching provides the opportunity for focused introspection, which is an integral part of making positive changes in business behavior,” Daraiseh said.

Who is best qualified to be an executive coach?

Some practitioners hold that psychologists make the best coaches. Most believe that an understanding of leadership, business disciplines, management principles and organizational politics is the critical core competency of executive coaches (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Levinson, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Tobias, 1996). The Sherpa survey confirms this: 96 percent of clients, purchasers of coaching and HR executives do not think that ‘psychologist or counselor’ is the best background for an executive coach.

There is no test or license needed to be called a coach; anyone who wants to can set up shop. According to a November 2007 article by Tara Weiss in *Forbes*, about 400 to 500 new members join the International Coach Federation – the career coach trade group – every month, according to its president, Kay Cannon. The federation’s

first survey (Feb ’07) shows there are about 30,000 career coaches worldwide, generating nearly \$1.5 billion in revenue, with the U.S. market accounting for approximately one half.

With coaching becoming so widespread, training and certification for executive coaches is gaining momentum. As more organizations include coaching



strategies as part of their executive development initiatives, the need for competent, certified coaches has soared.

“As an executive in a Fortune 500 company, I benefited from having an executive coach and was intrigued with the thought of pursuing that as a career,” said Steve Laswell, founder of NEXT LEVEL Executive Coaching, LLC. “I decided on Sherpa

Executive Coaching Certification to provide me with structure and legitimacy.”

Sherpa Executive Coaching Certification, offered at the Neeley School through the Tandy Center for Executive Leadership, provides executive coaches with specific credentials, helping them emphasize their effectiveness and increase their recognition as viable business partners.

Paulette Turner, who retired from a job at IBM that involved training and coaching sales executives and managers, decided to take what she had used for years and start an executive coaching business. But she wasn’t satisfied with the type of coaching she had been doing at the company. She wanted to provide more leadership development.

A member of Neeley’s International Board of Visitors, Turner heard about the Sherpa Executive Coaching Certification program.

“I read the book, took the course and took my coaching skills to another level,” she said.

Laswell commended the Neeley School and Sherpa Coaching for giving the executive coaching profession a university-based certification program.

“At the end of the three-month program, I was equipped to successfully launch our Tulsa-based business,” he said.

Sherpa coaching students go through 60 hours of classroom study and a 340-page text.



“The Neeley School doesn’t take this certification lightly, and our students don’t, either,” said Brenda Corbett, co-author of *The Sherpa Guide*. “Much of the class grade is based on rigorous testing for mastery of the material. We are consistently impressed with the caliber of coaching students at Neeley.”

The Sherpa program teaches coaches how to

turn their clients’ weaknesses into new strengths. Like Sherpa mountain guides, Sherpa coaches guide, advise and assist, allowing leaders to reach the summit through their own skill and will.

“My clients are interested in upping their game,” said Turner. “They are ready to spend the time needed to focus on their skill sets. I help them understand that they got where they are today because of their strengths, and now it’s time to remove any derailment factors.”

“The leadership development and behavior change I see with my clients has been consistent, whether a Fortune 500 VP, the IT manager of an international publishing company or the smaller business executives I coach,” said Laswell.

Professionals who take advantage of executive coaching know that failure is not an option. They must proactively prepare, manage, and sometimes reinvent themselves in order to navigate the twists, turns and transitions of the ever-changing business environment.

Executive coaching can provide the direction, skills and momentum, but it is up to the individual to turn that knowledge into action.

Elaine C. Cole is manager of public relations and events for the Neeley School of Business at TCU and a freelance writer.