

The 8 Biggest Mistakes People Make When Choosing an Executive Coach and How to Avoid Them

1. People don't spend time thinking about why they want a coach.

Getting a coach is trendy and can be a reflex reaction to a pain point. But if you only have a vague sense of why you want to work with a coach, you may end up with a poor fit for your goals and needs.

- **Basic Tip:** Spend 20 minutes writing down your pain points and areas in which you would like to get help. This will prepare you to talk with coaches about how they could help you in these areas.
- **Pro Tip:** Spend 20 additional minutes thinking about the longer arc of your career. What goals or directions thrill you? What opportunities do you want to create for yourself? How could coaching help you with these bigger aims?

2. People wait too long to get a coach.

You know you need some help, but all sorts of things keep getting in the way. Sometimes work or life just feels too busy to start a search process.

Sometimes you get analysis paralysis while choosing between coaches. This is understandable but it means that often months and occasionally years can go by without you getting the benefit of coaching.

- **Basic Tip:** Set a deadline to get started and a goal date for when you want to be working with a coach. In between, identify the steps you will take each week to move forwards.

- **Pro Tip:** Once you have identified the next steps, block specific time windows in your calendar to complete these items so that you have a clear plan. Remember that getting a coach is an investment in yourself and it is worth spending focused time on.

3. People don't run a good search process.

Running a search process takes energy. It can feel so much easier to just start with the first coach you meet or default to using your friend's coach. When you only meet with one coach, you have no comparison by which to judge the quality of the coach and the fit for you.

- **Basic Tip:** At a minimum, identify and talk to two coaches so that you can compare them. Many coaches will do a free initial consultation, so the investment is often just your time.
- **Pro Tip:** Get recommendations from your network and run an internet search to narrow to three top options to talk to as a starting point. If there isn't a clear winner at that point, meet with a couple more so that you feel confident with the coach you choose.

4. People want a guarantee of success.

You want to feel confident in the coach you pick – that makes sense. It can be tempting to overweight coaches who assure you that they have helped someone “just like you.” The reality is that everyone looking for a coach is different, their context is different, and the work they will put in is different. Not only is it important for your coach to see you a unique individual (and not the same as other clients they have coached) it is also critical that you understand your own role in the success of the coaching – and that no coach can guarantee a particular outcome.

- **Basic Tip:** Remember that a key piece of the success of coaching is your own participation. A coach can advise and support but at the end of the day, you need to go out and do the work to produce the results you want. Be honest with yourself: Are you ready to try some new things or suggestions? Are you willing to take ownership to create your own best results?
- **Pro Tip:** Spend 20 minutes thinking about what time and energy you are willing to commit to your goal and the coaching process. Look at your

calendar and decide when you could block time for the coaching sessions as well as time to reflect, read, learn, and practice as part of the coaching process.

5. People think all coaches are created equal.

Coaches have a wide variety of different backgrounds, levels of experience, and coaching philosophies. For example, someone can start coaching with as little as a 6-week training certificate and no other working experience. Another coach may have extensive experience in the working world but no coaching expertise. The key is to avoid choosing a coach that does not have sufficient expertise and experience to be a good advisor and thought partner for you in pursuit of your goals.

- **Basic Tip:** When you are interviewing coaches, ask questions to better understand the experience, background, and training of the coaches you are interviewing. Choose a coach that has sufficient experience and expertise to provide the help you are looking for.
- **Pro Tip:** When you are selecting the coaches you want to talk to initially, do a preliminary filter to source coaches with at least 5 years of experience coaching people at your level or above.

6. People want great coaching but think it should be cheap.

People use coaching for a variety of different types of goals, but everyone wants their coach to be great. The truth is that great coaching takes lots of experience, continual investment in learning, and a deep commitment to excellence, not dissimilar from what you would look for in another professional like a top-quality lawyer. While you can find a cheap coach (or lawyer), remember that you generally get what you pay for.

- **Basic Tip:** Think about your budget for coaching before you start your search process. Then, when you reach out to coaches, ask for a quote prior to meeting with them so that you can avoid wasting time on someone that is way out of your budget. Do meet with at least one coach at the top of your budget (vs. picking the cheapest options you can find) so that you can compare quality and experience across price points.
- **Pro Tip:** Spend 20 minutes thinking about your goal and how valuable it is to you? If you excelled at your goal, what would the ROI look like and

be worth to you? How does that compare to what you initially thought about investing in coaching? Does that change your budget? For example, paying for elite-level coaching can be well worth it if your goal has the potential for a 10x or more ROI on your coaching investment.

7. Past industry experience does not always equal a great coach.

Many people go into coaching because they want to share their specialized industry experience with others. Depending on how narrow the niche is, and how it matches with your own goals, this can be a good thing. The risks of picking a coach with this background are that: (1) they may have no experience with coaching others and (2) their coaching may be limited to what worked for them in the past. This type of coaching doesn't acknowledge how you and your situation may be different and that can lead to bad results.

- **Basic Tip:** When you are interviewing coaches, ask about their experience as a coach, how they coach people, and why they do it that way. You're looking for a thoughtful and informed philosophy backed up by experience.
- **Pro Tip:** As part of your coach search, interview a couple of coaches who don't specialize in your industry as data point for comparison.

8. People don't commit to the process long-term.

It's natural to want to see some immediate results from coaching and to solve your pain points quickly. The risk of this perspective is that it can lead you to choose a coach who is overly focused on tactics and quick wins. When this happens, you miss the opportunity to invest in the perspectives, clarity, and strategies that produce longer-term, larger success at your goals. It can also lead you to quit the coaching process too soon and leave a lot of potential value on the table.

- **Basic Tip:** Before you start your coaching process, be honest about how long you are willing to commit to participating in coaching and what your expectations are for the depth of change and growth you are looking for. As you are speaking with coaches, ask how long they typically work with clients to make sure you are aligning on your expectations for the length and depth of engagement.

- **Pro Tip:** Spend 20 minutes thinking beyond the immediate changes you would like to see. What is the longer-term trajectory you would like to be on? What valuable areas of growth or change will take a longer investment or learning curve?

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