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Executive Coaching: One Insider's View

By Ann Golden Eglé, MCC

As I enter into my seventeenth year of coaching top-shelf leaders and executives, I am often asked two questions: 1) what I most admire in these already highly-successful individuals; and 2) why I work solely with individual leaders and not entire teams. Both answers are simple yet complex.

First, the admirable traits: brilliance, honesty, authenticity, vision, confidence, vulnerability, humor, a healthy understanding of the difference between power and ego, and last but, certainly not least, the blend of intuition and self trust.

- **Brilliance.** Not simply very, very smart but also brilliant in the manner in which they create opportunities and approach challenges.
- **Honesty.** Builds trust and respect. People know who they're dealing with, no games.
- **Authenticity.** One of a kind. Genuine irrespective of how others act, think, or make decisions.
- **Vision.** A keen and continual awareness of what needs to improve in themselves and their business.
- **Confidence.** Nothing can damage relationships (with clients, subordinates, colleagues, boards) faster than self-doubt.
- **Vulnerability.** Openly admit and learn from mistakes. Refreshing and inspiring.
- **Humor.** Used wisely, it cuts through messy situations, especially with one's self.
- **Healthy understanding of power vs. ego.** Each has the power to make changes, influence others, alter careers and make a difference. The danger is when ego leads to a destructive use of power which can destroy people and companies.
- **Intuition/self trust.** The number one most vital trait in a leader. Nothing can replace it—no book, theory, course or coach. It's innate.

Next, I'll answer the often-asked question regarding my focus of working with individual leaders and executives, and not with their entire team. Note, I often work with various individuals on the same team—just not the team as a whole entity.

I initially tried to spread my expertise over both intensive, very personal leadership coaching and more general team coaching.

While both can be valuable depending on the situation, I found the ability to go more deeply into issues that held good leaders back from being 'great' was far more worthwhile to the company and rewarding to me.

Every leader has their challenge(s), each is different. They can confidentially explore perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, annoyances, goals and history with me that is not appropriate to share with their team.

It takes a great leader to lead a great team. If the leader is mediocre, no amount of team coaching will matter.

Case in point: “Why Good Managers Are so Rare” (*HBR March 12, 2015 article*) discusses the need for great leaders to motivate and engage great workers:

Gallup reported in two large-scale studies in 2012 that only 30% of U.S. employees are engaged at work and a staggeringly low 13% worldwide are engaged.

“Bad managers cost businesses billions of dollars each year, and having too many can bring down a company. Companies should systematically demand that every team within their workforce have a great leader.

“After all, the root of performance variability lies within human nature. Teams are composed of individuals with diverging needs related to morale, motivation, and clarity — all of which lead to varying degrees of performance. Nothing less than great leaders can maximize them.”

I applaud each of the hundreds of leaders, professionals, executives and business owners with whom I’ve had the opportunity to work one-to-one through the past seventeen years. Each has taught me something new that benefits the next client and one after that.

There is too much confusion around the field of coaching. My hope is that this article sheds some light on at least the Executive and Leadership niche.

Great leaders are vital to the success of any business, community, country. Please contact me with questions or thoughts of items you’d like explored in future articles.

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