

Executive coaching for the non-profit-sector

Executive coaching can maximise senior executives' effectiveness, says Nicola Stevens, and lend support at the top of the organisation

The pressure is on in the Not for Profit (NPS) world, of governance compliance, increased competition for funds, public support and awareness. It has finally been acknowledged that to run a truly successful NPS venture it's Board and Trustees need access to more business skills and talents than their counterparts in the commercial world.

The responsibilities of the Board and Trustees in the NPS are greater than those of their commercial counterparts due to the nature of NPS work. The rules, regulation, selection and make up of the Board are comparable with the business, but there are additional governance on issues such as regulating overall guidelines throughout countrywide offices and monitoring help lines. So, apart from the usual range of business experience such as finance, law, innovation, creativity, employee relationships and leadership, CEO's and Trustees in NPS ventures need to be able to work with the media and government, raise awareness, and be tireless networkers. A balance of the above mentioned talents and skills is often the reason their projects are being awarded Government grants and Lottery funding that are essential to their existence.

There is another important factor that demand strong skills and talents from the Board and Trustees. Although there are employees working in the NPS, in many cases much of the productivity in the form of time, energy and expertise is donated by volunteers from the grass roots through to the Board itself. When working with strong ideals and passionate belief there needs to be inspiring and empathetic leadership to synthesise all these factors successfully even in a difficult or unchartered situations. However flat the hierarchies are becoming in a effort to make the decisions inclusive, finally a decision will be made, or consent given. This is the job of the Board and Trustees, who will be held responsible if it does not work. It's tough at the top, it can feel isolated and lonely but with the aid of an Executive Coach these experiences can be assessed, learnt from and horizons stretched.

What can Executive Coaching accomplish in the NPS?

Executive coaching creates a non-judgemental, totally confidential challenging space, which provides a sounding board to test and create strategies and learning. This process will maximise the Board's, and senior managers's professional and personal effectiveness, giving them a greater clarity of the role they need exercise and the objectives they plan to achieve.

Executive coaching, which grew out of innovation and necessity, incorporates the coaching techniques and notion of 'personal best' from the sporting arena into the commercial world. Coaching within the business sector has shown itself to be invaluable to facilitate innovation, increase potential, revenue, productivity and opportunities bringing sustainable success. First premise an executive coaches from is that whatever concerns an organisation of any size has, at some level it is working. This positive stance encourages everyone involved to look at what is right and working well, and do more of that. The benefits of Executive coaching are found in all three identifiable areas within a organisation.

- (1) At Boardroom and Trustee level
- (2) Within the supporting teams - managerial, employees and volunteers
- (3) By increased public awareness and performance of the organisation.

(1) At Boardroom and Trustee levels, the role of the leadership is complex and multi-facitated as reviewed at the beginning of this article. However, in essence leadership is about creating a vision, inspiring others to take ownership of the vision, and to create the energy to sustain the actions necessary to move towards the vision. In order to do this the leadership will need to be able to enhance team working at boardroom levels and within it's supporting teams. This work will be optimised by examining the broad range of personal talents they have and skills they need to achieve their part in the vision. Executive coaching provides the opportunities of individuals and organisational growth and is best achieved where individuals and organisations are committed to their professional development.

The job of the executive coach is to provide a space, challenge, act as a sounding board and hold the individual in their own right and as part of a team to move forward. The coaching client will assess where they are now, where they want to go and what they need to improve and learn to fulfil that mission. It is not the work of the coach to dispense advice, neither is coaching to be seen as a dependent relationship. The Coach's work is to aid the clarification of roles and objectives, and in many cases to highlight areas of possible development, effectiveness and flexibility. The non-directive approach of the coach allows the ability of the coaching client to help learn for themselves by listening and questioning what they are doing and saying and what assumptions and beliefs they hold personally and professionally.

Executive coaching services are provided by external coaching consultants. By the very nature of a consultant being an outsider to the organisation, the coach is able to be objective and truthful. All too often, charismatic leaders can find that their Board and supporting teams are unwilling to give them truly objective feedback. Many employees at all levels are unwilling to be completely open and honest with other members of the organisation when they have concerns. However helpful colleagues try to be, they often have an agenda of their own when listening. A coach's only agenda is that the coaching clients experience and learn what they need to utilise their full potential. The executive coaching will reflect the individual requirements and concerns with the aim of helping the individual to develop as a leader within the organisation.

(2) Within the supporting teams of managerial and employed staff and volunteer teams, retention, collective responsibility of ideas, commitment, motivation and job satisfaction are all issues that are essential to success within the corporate world. These issues are just as important in the NPS whether it is to attract the right talent from corporate life to share their expertise as an employee or volunteer to donate time to increase awareness and raise funding. Companies are increasingly encouraging their staff to donate their professional expertise. This could be part of the company's own corporate social responsibility policy, or as part of the increasing demand for the staff benefit of work/life balance in the corporate sector.

In order to attract the best talent and skills, there is a requirement for the Board to be seen and known to be the best. Being role models of excellence can create pressures but the work of the Executive Coach is principally aimed at focusing on issues essential to the individual to work at their maximum personal and professional best.

Always expect the Coach to question and investigate all areas of personal and professional motivation. They will help highlight personal interests and attitudes, mirror situations as presented to them and give truthful feedback about what they hear. The process of coaching demands a willingness to reflect on personal attitudes and beliefs.

Fundamentally, the aim of executive coaching is about making conversations happen. Within any organisation this action will strengthen and enrich the quality of communication from the top of the organisation to the grass roots, and allow communication from the grass roots up to the top of the organisation. The power of knowing that ideas and concerns from the bedrock of a NPS venture can be passed up and considered by the Board and Trustees, is invaluable to creating and sustaining loyalty and the public support. This can be enhanced by the introduction of an internal mentoring programme which can be monitored by the executive coach.

(3) By increased public awareness and performance for the organisation from within, it will be able to carry out the vision and goals with successive clarity and purpose. As a whole, all levels within the organisation will have a constructive heightened degree of working together, to sustain improved productivity, motivation and effect resolutions of challenges within its infrastructure. The public awareness will generate its own reward of support for the vision and aims, which in turn create the much needed revenue in both hard currency and in the donation of time, expertise and energy.

Executive coaching is an invaluable service to aid the Board and Trustees on the NPS. It is imperative that when assessing the merits of the performance of an organisation, that the investigation comes from a positive stance. Executive coaches are trained to look for what is currently working well in an organisation and building on that premise to identify and create excellence, rather than finding problems, and trying to do less of them.

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