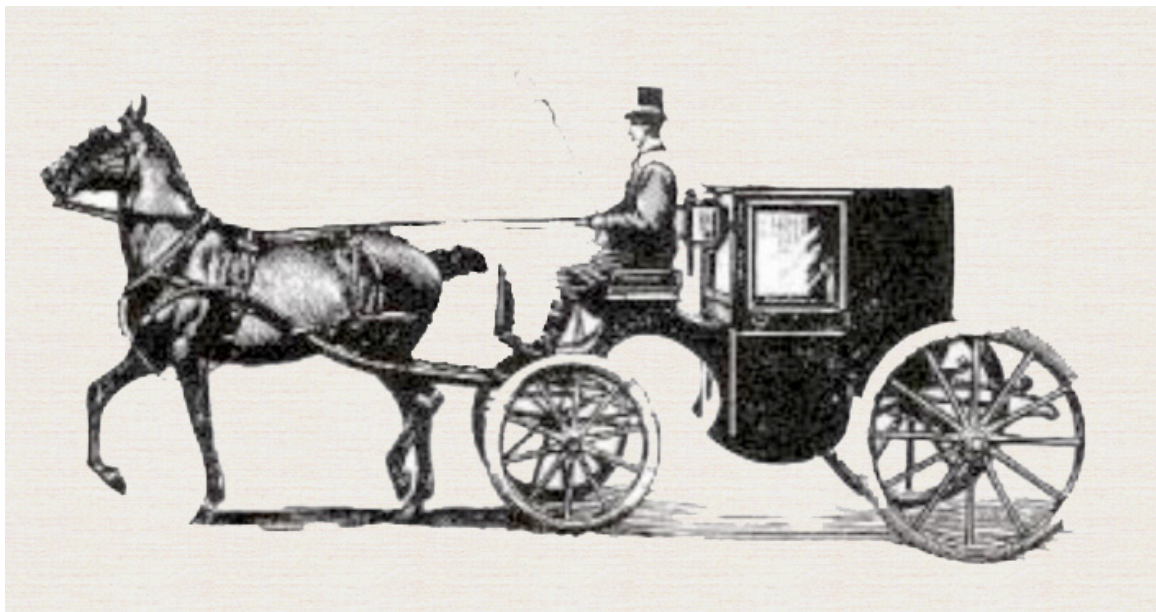


The Purpose of Executive Coaching Parts I-V

**By Charlie Lang, Executive Progressor (Coach, Trainer, Facilitator)
Managing Partner @ Progress-U Asia Group**



Trouble with the New One

The Purpose of Executive Coaching [Part I]

How do people get into more senior positions? Usually by changing jobs and applying for higher positions, or by being promoted internally.

What is the basis for these promotions? Promotions are usually based on previous job performance. However, the factors that will make the candidate successful in the new job might be quite different from the success factors of the previous position – and this fact is often overlooked.

Ideally, the management responsible for the promotion should recognize this possible discrepancy before actually promoting the candidate and should put a development plan in place (the June Leadership Newsletter will deal with this aspect).

Aside from the difference in job suitability, expectations of the management and the candidate may not be properly aligned. This can lead to a great risk of disappointments on either side.

I developed the “Start-Up Right!” Program when I got an emergency call from one of my clients, an international logistics company with regional headquarters in Hong Kong. Their Asia-Pacific HR director expressed his concern about their new finance director, John (*not his real name*), a 43-year-old MBA graduate and specialist in corporate finance. My client employed John 3 months earlier and the HR director felt that if nothing changed, he might need to fire John within the 6-month probation period.

I found out that the following issues developed:

- John could not win the acceptance and respect of the new team.
- John found a corporate culture in place, one that was considerably different from the culture he was used to.
- John was an expatriate sent from the European headquarters and had difficulties understanding the different mentality of the locals.
- John applied an authoritative style different from the participative style used by his predecessor.

Of course, because the organization invested a great deal in transferring this highly qualified manager, they did not want to see him fail because it would incur further cost and would send a negative message to the executives in the European headquarters who also considered an international transfer.

As the situation was already quite serious, we decided to establish an emergency plan, which consisted of:

- A suitability assessment (Harrison Position Comparison Report)
- An environment assessment (interview of some direct reports, colleagues and superiors)
- A set of 13 coaching sessions (3 double coaching sessions in the first month, 3 single coaching sessions in the second month and 2 coaching sessions each in the third and fourth month)

1. Suitability Assessment

The Harrison Position Comparison Report (Upper Management) revealed that John was quite suitable for this position, but had a couple of traits that needed to be developed for him to be successful. He scored rather low on Collaboration (3.2 on a scale of 0 to 10) and Diplomatic (2.8). He had particularly high scores on Optimistic (9.2), Pressure Tolerance (9.6) and Manages Stress Well (8.9). His score on self-acceptance seemed OK at 7.2.

So we decided to have a closer look at John's willingness to collaborate and his readiness to develop a more diplomatic communication style.

2. Environment Assessment

We carried out a mini 360-degree assessment with two employees of John's choice, his direct superior, the managing director of the Asian headquarters and two colleagues, also selected by John. According to their answers, John was perceived as a highly intelligent and competent person. However, they didn't find him sensitive enough to local culture and didn't like the way he communicated. They found him, as someone put it, "too strong in his use of words."

3. Coaching Sessions

I noticed that John was a bit skeptical towards the coaching process. He was never coached before and achieved his current career position with little help from others.

To make John feel comfortable with the process, I first acknowledged him for his achievements in Europe and congratulated him for having gotten the promotion. When we looked at the assessments, I directed him to focus on his strong points, knowing that pointing out the low scores first would make him defensive. Even though John tried to talk about the low scores immediately, I stopped him from doing so and asked him to explain how his strong traits helped him achieve the past successes in his career.

Then we looked at his current situation and I asked him how his strengths currently support him now. From there he started to see how these strengths served him much more in the past than they do today. He eventually realized that the success factors of his current position differ from those of his past situation.

John finally opened up and was willing to discover the skills and traits he would need to develop to become successful in his current position. The assessment results are helpful as pointers, but must be interpreted in the specific context.

John agreed to work with me in developing:

- A more adequate communication style with his team members and colleagues
- A more respectful and appreciative view of the competencies of his team members
- A participative leadership style that helps him share the responsibility and fosters engagement among the team members

Before coaching John through these issues, we agreed that we would ask those who participated in the 360-degree assessment to support John in this development project by giving him honest, well-meant and respectful feedback whenever they deemed appropriate. We enlisted them as co-coaches to help John make this transition as fast as possible.

In my praxis, I found that the involvement of environment is key to successful development because executives don't operate in a vacuum. Even if the executive is ready to change and actually does change his attitude and behavior, the environment can discourage him by not accepting the new behavior, like by cynically dismissing it, etc.

After 2 months of intense coaching, we collected progress feedback from the participants and noticed a considerable improvement in John's evaluation. The greatest leap was perceived in his communication style and the way people felt valued. They found that his leadership style could further improve by giving even more autonomy to the team members.

As a result, the managing director and HR director decided to keep John on board and complete the coaching program over the next 2 months to further stabilize the situation.

This was a risky assignment and honestly, I prefer not to be involved in these emergency situations, as there is a high risk of failure. I suggest to my clients that they organize a regular "Start-Up Right!" Program for every person being promoted to a higher position. Not only will this minimize the risk of such problematic escalations, but the employer also immediately benefits from higher productivity, smoother integration and avoidance of major disappointments due to misaligned expectations. It's money very well invested.

In Part II, we will talk about the preparation of an executive for a more senior position.

Purpose Statement: The basic purpose of executive coaching is to help the coachee further improve his performance and make better decisions to maximize his success and, subsequently, the success of his organization.

What makes me successful today might not work tomorrow

The Purpose of Executive Coaching [Part II]

In Part I of this series, I elaborated that the success factors that help people perform well in their current position might not make them successful when they get promoted to a higher position.

Luckily, some executives and/or their employers are aware of this potential problem and therefore want to make sure that they are properly prepared before taking on a new assignment.

Peter (not his real name) worked for the Hong Kong subsidiary of a large international apparel company as a sales and marketing manager. He was responsible for the development of the Hong Kong market and was quite successful in expanding the market share over the past 3 years. As a consequence, the management decided to consider a promotion to Director of Sales and Marketing for the Asia-Pacific region. He would succeed his current boss who was supposed to be transferred to Europe within the next 6 to 12 months.

Although the current Sales and Marketing Director and the HR director supported Peter's promotion, they were also aware that Peter was not quite ready to take on the position for the following reasons:

- a) They were concerned that other local marketing managers (e.g., in Australia, Korea, etc.) would not accept Peter; they were worried about his assertiveness.
- b) Peter did not have much international experience and the new position required open-mindedness and cross-cultural sensitivity. As these values were not as relevant in Peter's current position, they were not quite sure about his capacity to acquire the necessary traits.
- c) Peter was a fairly good presenter and clients usually really liked and appreciated him. However, during the few times he had to make presentations to senior management, he seemed quite nervous and didn't make as good an impression as he could have. As he would become part of the senior management team, his current boss wanted to make sure that he gets sufficient and immediate acceptance and respect in that circle of colleagues.

To assure Peter's suitability for the director's position, the HR director suggested engaging an executive coach to fast-track Peter's development.

The Purpose of Executive Coaching – Parts I-V

When I met Peter for the first time, he seemed to feel OK about having a coach, but was initially slightly resistant, perhaps because he first wanted to figure out what coaching was all about and whether I would be able to assist him in his development. Also, he seemed to be worried about confidentiality issues.

Like most of my clients, Peter had never been professionally coached so I was quite familiar with his initial attitude. In the first session I clarified my approach with him and showed him the confidentiality section of the Coaching Agreement that I established with the HR director. It clearly stated that I would not disclose anything discussed during the coaching sessions without prior approval from Peter. I noticed from his body language that after 20 to 30 minutes into the first session, he started to become more relaxed and opened up accordingly.

We used the Harrison Assessment Paradox report to cross-check the concerns raised by the management, especially in terms of openness and assertiveness. We found that in the "Power Paradox" (*assertive vs helpful*), his score for *assertiveness* was 5.3 on a scale of 0 to 10 and for *helpful*, 8.9. That means that his normal behavior is in a range from being mutually helpful (desired for this position) to self-sacrificing (less desired). However, when under severe stress, Peter tends to be dominating, which creates occasional conflicts with his colleagues.

In terms of *openness*, Peter scored quite high (9.2). This behavior was balanced with an 8.6 in *being certain*. When both traits of a paradox (*assertive/helpful* or *open/certain*) are balanced, we notice a relatively stable behavior without any "shadows." If the traits of a paradox are imbalanced, a behavior opposite to the normal behavior (shadow) surfaces during times of considerable stress.

We agreed on a coaching schedule with three coaching sessions per month over a period of 5 months. During this time period, we developed his assertiveness and worked on his self-acceptance, which also scored quite low. We repeated the assessment at the end of our coaching assignment as a way to measure the effectiveness of coaching. We found that his assertiveness improved from 5.3 to 7.1, and his self-acceptance from 4.8 to 7.4.

We also developed his cross-cultural skills by exposing him more to different cultures through three short business trips to culturally challenging countries and through participation in some cultural events in Hong Kong (Korean theater, etc.). I also encouraged him to pick up some relevant literature to further his intercultural understanding.

During one double session, we practiced an actual presentation for senior management. I took the perspective of the audience and provided Peter with likely feed-forward from senior managers. Also, I helped him further improve his presentation skills through some changes that are relatively easy to implement. Nevertheless, I suggested to Peter and his management that he should attend at least one good professional presentation course, which takes around 1 to 2 days.

Peter got promoted at the end of the fourth month (sooner than planned) because the current director had to urgently relocate to Europe. Despite the fact that Peter did not seem to be 100% ready at the time, his HR director and his immediate boss saw Peter's considerable progress and trusted that he would reach the desired competency level within a short time after taking over the new position. In fact, Peter asked his management to extend the coaching assignment by another 2 months to assure a successful start-up in the critical first 3 months. His wish was granted.

In Part III, you learn how professional coaching can fast-track you from being a manager to being a leader.

The Fast Track from Manager to Leader

The Purpose of Executive Coaching [Part III]

How do you know if you are simply a manager or a leader as well?

The great Peter F. Drucker once said, "Management is doing things right, leadership is doing the right things." John Sculley offered an even more detailed comparison: "Leadership is often confused with other things, specifically management. As I see it, leadership revolves around vision, ideas, direction, and has more to do with inspiring people as to direction and goals than with day-to-day implementation. One can't lead unless one can leverage more than his own capabilities . . . You have to be capable of inspiring other people to do things without actually sitting on top of them with a checklist – that's management, not leadership."

I find that these two quotes give us a good idea of how a manager is different from a leader. Of course, a leader must not cease to be a manager in order to be a leader – it's just that he needs to develop additional competencies to become an effective leader. Are good management skills a prerequisite to being a good leader? Not necessarily, though these skills are highly useful.

So what does it take to become an effective leader?

Karen* is the managing director of the regional headquarters of a multinational company. She was pirated from a competitor where she was a successful sales director responsible for both the marketing and sales departments.

Less than half a year into her new job, she felt extremely stressed and drained of energy. She had never experienced this before – in fact, she was known for being a power woman, always positive and energetic. She couldn't quite understand what was going on. She worked long hours, as in her previous jobs, and was fully committed to achieve excellent results.

Unfortunately, the results didn't develop as expected and the workload seemed to increase by the day. What happened?

When Karen finally contacted me to figure out what was going on and how I could help her, I asked her to describe her typical working day in as much detail as possible. I also inquired about the way she communicated and interacted with the other senior managers. Finally, I asked her what

components of her job are most important for her to be a successful managing director.

Based on her answers and the previously mentioned definitions of management and leadership, Karen appeared to function as a manager, not as a leader, in her new company.

We also talked about how things worked out so well in her previous position. It turned out that her boss was a strong leader who took over the leadership aspect of her role as a sales director so she could focus on managing the daily work and supporting the key account managers in winning important orders. Together, they produced a winning combination of leadership and management.

She suddenly realized that this important function of her previous boss – which she took for granted at that time – was missing, and that it was her responsibility to take over this task.

Within the first 3 months, we focused on creating a clear direction for the regional headquarters, which we developed together with the senior management team:

- A vision statement (Where do we want to go?)
- A mission statement (Why do we want to go there? What is the purpose?)
- A value statement (Which principles should guide us on our way?)

Based on the vision, Karen and her directors decided on a strategy that would most likely make the vision a reality.

While completing the direction, we worked on her communication skills, especially when talking in front of larger internal or external groups. Karen also noticed that even though one of her strengths was her ability to create good rapport almost instantly, she sometimes had problems sustaining relationships. She realized that she rarely coached her reports, which caused frustration and decreased engagement.

As a consequence, we practiced coaching skills, feedback and feed-forward, as well as how to make employee participation more effective.

It was also important for Karen to learn that she had to let go of being the “super manager”, as a former colleague described her. This was not her main job anymore. As she already had a good knowledge of the capabilities of each

The Purpose of Executive Coaching – Parts I-V

of her reports, she was able to delegate more management tasks. Also, she followed my advice to employ a capable personal assistant to free her from everyday tasks.

As a result, after 9 months of coaching, Karen's and her company's situation changed dramatically:

For Karen:

- She still worked long hours, but found it much more enjoyable.
- She became as energized as she used to be.
- She made the shift from being a “super manager” to being a “super leader.”

For her company:

- Engagement (we made an employee satisfaction inquiry at the beginning and after 9 months) greatly improved.
- Retention, especially of the high performers, considerably improved.
- The financial results showed a new positive trend after approximately 6 months.

Karen decided to continue having coaching sessions to further strengthen her leadership competencies. Also, she noticed that coaching helped her when making important decisions because she had an unbiased yet understanding sparring partner who challenged her thoughts and expanded her awareness.

Of course, professional executive coaching is not the only way to develop leadership competencies, but it is perhaps the fastest and most effective way. Cases like Karen's clearly prove the potential value of coaching.

* Details have been changed to protect the identity of our clients.

In Part IV of this series, we will explain how executive coaching can help successful managers change disruptive behaviors

The Purpose of Executive Coaching (Part IV) Behavioral Change – the Key to More Success



"I haven't conquered my procrastination problem yet, but just you wait."

Do you know of leaders who are successful but actually limit their full potential because of certain behavioral patterns? What would it take for them to change the patterns that have become habits over the years?

Matthew (not his real name) is the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of a large finance corporation. He is in his late 40s and reached his current position through good education, a lot of hard work and the willingness to continuously learn new competencies required to successfully master various challenges throughout his career.

His ultimate target is to become the CEO at his present company (or at a similar corporation). He has been the CFO for almost 5 years and their current CEO is due to retire in 2 years. However, even though Matthew's performance has been outstanding, he recently gathered that he was not even considered for the CEO position.

When I met Matthew for the first time, I was impressed with his level of self-organization and self-discipline. In addition, he seemed to use verbal and non-verbal communication effectively. Interestingly though, I felt a lack of connection between us, which gave me the first hint of the root cause of his "problem."

The Purpose of Executive Coaching – Parts I-V

During our first session, he briefly told me the history of his education and career path, and quickly came to the point: "Why am I not one of the candidates for the CEO position? What do I need to do to become the first choice?"

Apparently he had some discussions with the current CEO and a couple of board members who gave him similar feedback: they truly appreciated his work as CFO and believed that he has the potential to become CEO in the future, but they felt that he was not yet ready at the present time. When he tried to get more concrete information, he received vague answers, such as "You still need to gain more experience" or "We think we need a more senior person in this position" – statements that were frustrating for Matthew because he felt that he couldn't pro-actively do anything to overcome these concerns.

Let's briefly reflect on how managers usually get promoted. It is both a conscious and subconscious process. On the conscious level, higher management looks at the qualifications and experience needed for the position and then tries to find eligible candidates. On the subconscious level, people in charge may have a potential candidate in mind and then try to imagine how the person fits the bill. For instance, management may have a general idea of how a candidate would deal with possible challenging situations and different stakeholders, like employees, colleagues, superiors, customers, shareholders, etc. These subconscious thoughts play a huge part in ruling out ineligible people.

Actually, there is nothing wrong with this approach because it uses intuitive capabilities, which may be a better judge than the conscious mind. The only problem is that depending solely on intuition unnecessarily limits options.

In the case of Matthew, further discussions with colleagues and the CEO revealed that there was an unspoken fear that Matthew would not gain sufficient acceptance from the management team, the major shareholders and the media due to the way he unknowingly creates distance with the people he interacts with. As the role of CEO required a lot of public interaction, the board was worried that Matthew would be rejected and consequently damage the company's image and progress.

To help Matthew create better rapport with people, I tried to approach the problem from a different angle and use his strengths to make some headway. One of Matthew's strengths was his ability to stand by his commitments. His commendable level of self-discipline made him a role model for this desired behavior. I explained to him that his outstanding ability to carry out agreements might allow him to "risk" displaying more warmth and empathy

The Purpose of Executive Coaching – Parts I-V

towards the people he interacts with. I helped him realize that slightly changing his behavior would not endanger or lessen his strength, but would complement it instead. He agreed to give it a try.

We also decided to create an internal support team consisting of people (two colleagues and one long-time customer) who would regularly remind him of his intended behavioral change and would give him positive feedback and encouragement.

Over the next 6 to 9 months, a real behavioral change became apparent. Matthew became more relaxed and he seemed to make more of a connection with his colleagues. He could even joke with colleagues from time to time without losing his self-discipline and resolve when it came to performing tasks.

As a result, the morale and engagement in his department further improved and the CEO indicated that the board of directors reconsidered Matthew for the CEO position.

Changing Corporate Culture – How a Coach Can Support the Leader in this Process

The Purpose of Executive Coaching (V)

Corporate Culture was defined by Deal and Kennedy, the authors of “Corporate Cultures – The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life” as *...the way we do things around here*. This is a very simple yet concise definition of corporate culture.

Corporate culture is influenced on one hand by formal and informal rules, regulations and systems, and on the other hand by the behavior of corporate leaders, particularly the head of an organization.

In this article I will focus more on the leaders’ behaviors and how a coach can support the leader in the attempt to achieve a corporate success culture.

Strong Culture = Success Culture?

The daughter company of one of my former clients, a Japanese technology company (system integrator), was founded during the early 1970’s. The founding president was a passionate engineer who instilled a strong culture in his organization. One of the core values he promoted was to be technologically skilled.

Being a man of high integrity – an ingredient that helps build a strong culture – he selected mostly employees and executives who were also very ‘technological’. Tolerated exceptions were for jobs like bookkeeping, etc. which didn’t require any technological skills.

During the 1970s and up to the late 1980s, this strong culture greatly supported the company’s goals and development. However, in the early 1990s, the business environment in Japan changed considerably. Cash flow among customers tightened, such that the ideal technical solution wasn’t affordable anymore. Customers were seeking a more economically viable solution.

Unfortunately, when I was called in, the company had already suffered over 10 years of decline. It had also been taken over by another organization, which engaged me to help implement a culture change.

It soon became apparent that the current president, only a few years short of retirement and disappointed that he had been forced to sell his company,

The Purpose of Executive Coaching – Parts I-V

could not drive the necessary changes. Hence my client (the mother company) agreed to install a new manager to head this technology company.

In order to support the new president, we first made an assessment of the existing corporate culture. This assessment included the listing of all written rules, regulations and systems that influenced the organization's culture at that time. We also conducted interviews to identify informal (unwritten) rules and regulations.

Changing Cultures

As a next step, I helped my client develop an image of an ideal corporate culture that would support the company in making its vision a reality. We discussed which values would need to be promoted, and which beliefs, attitudes and behaviors would best serve the company's goals.

Once we had developed a clear picture of the desired corporate success culture, we worked on a detailed implementation plan. During the development of this plan, I frequently challenged the new president by putting myself into the position of the employees and how they would be likely to respond to the suggested action items. This feedback and feed-forward process helped him develop a very solid vision, strategy and plan for the implementation of the necessary actions.

Since it is key to get the buy-in from the key opinion makers within the executive team, I practiced with the president on how to coach these crucial people to make their buy-in most likely.

Finally we developed a communication strategy to get all employees to understand the new culture and what would be expected of them.

The Role of the Coach

The greatest value a professional executive coach can add to a corporate culture change project is to help the top executives gain a better understanding of the human dynamics associated with change. The coach can help the leaders develop communication competence, coaching ability, and the necessary integrity which is particularly crucial in cultural change projects.

Furthermore, the coach can act as a sparring partner for the leader, i.e. the leader can first 'try out' her/his ideas with the coach before actually implementing them.

After the successful cultural change initiative, which was completely implemented over a period of 12 months, the Japanese technology company

The Purpose of Executive Coaching – Parts I-V

turned profitable. This happened towards the end of the change initiative. We made sure that the new culture would be sustainable and supportive of current goals. A periodical review process was installed to ensure that history wouldn't repeat itself.

Purpose Statement: The basic purpose of executive coaching is to help the coachee in his development in order to further improve his performance and make better decisions to maximize his success and, subsequently, the success of his organization.

About the Author of this E-Book



Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U in 2002. His mission is to assist his clients in developing a corporate coaching culture for the benefit of all stakeholders. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Keynote Speaker and Author of over 150 articles related to leadership, coaching, change management and innovative sales.

In 2005, he published the book "The Groupness Factor" (see <http://www.progressu.com/groupness-book.php>). In 2012, he completed his second book, "The Coach Factor", a business fiction on corporate coaching culture. Charlie's articles got printed in publications like Human Resources, FZ Magazine, Banking Today, SCMP, Effective Executive, A PLUS and CareerTimes.

Charlie is a founding member and Past President (2007/08 and 08/09) of the Hong Kong International Coaching Community, one of Asia's largest coaching associations and Program Director of the Asia Innovative Coaching Institute. Progress-U has offices in Bangkok, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore and Tokyo and works with over 60 carefully selected coaches across Asia.