

Coaching executives to maintain loyalty

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As the battle for talent rages again, retention strategies have become a priority for many companies. More and more are calling on the services of coaching companies to preserve their human assets. Charlie Lang, founder of Progress-U Ltd and co-founder of the HK International Coaching Community, explains.

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HK ECHO: What exactly is executive coaching?

Charlie Lang: Traditionally, leadership development consists of “management training” or, for high potentials, “mentoring”. The problem with the terms “training” and “mentoring” is that they imply a ‘top-down’ approach: the trainer or mentor generally advises the trainee what to do. This may still work with very inexperienced and junior managers but it works less and less with more seasoned executives.

When coaching at managerial levels, we work on behavioural change; and this requires less sharing of new knowledge or skills than a shift in the person’s mindset (especially beliefs and attitude). Executive coaching has proven to be very effective to achieve this target.

HKE: How do you work? What methods do you use?

CL: Professional coaches achieve shifts in mindset by stimulating the trainee to look at things from a new perspective. They can use assessment, role-play and other experiential tools to do that. Coaching assignments can extend from a couple of months to more than one year with weekly, fortnightly or monthly sessions of one hour up to half-day sessions each, depending on the company’s needs. In some cases, we re-do assessments after the coaching assignment to measure the progress.

HKE: What kind of companies call on your services and what are their most common needs?

CL: We are contacted by companies from all sectors and of all sizes although most are multinationals working in the finance, retail and technology industries. Certain requests from upper management have become commonplace these days, for example: "The gap between our middle and senior management is just too big. Therefore, we can't promote our more junior managers to the next level, so we need to hire senior managers from outside." Executive Search companies in Greater China confirm the trend and the fight for that rare breed of well-rounded and competent senior executive. Other typical requests include preparation for promotion, support in new positions, specific behavioural changes, sparring for top managers, dealing with emotional issues and so on.

HKE: Why do you think companies are growing more sensitive to coaching today than they were, say, five years ago?

CL: It is true there has been a rise in number of coaching companies recently in Hong Kong: in 2002, there were around 20 professionals and in 2007, this number grew beyond 100. But I guess the 'need' from companies was there all the time, I don't see that it has particularly increased except that the war for talent has sharpened. It's just that many companies neither had the practice nor the awareness of the benefits of coaching. The HKICC (HK International Coaching Community) which was founded five years ago has certainly contributed to making the benefits better known in the (HR) community. Also, overseas HQs insist more today than five years ago that the same practices as in Europe and US should be adopted in Asia.

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Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to assist his clients in becoming excellent leaders for the benefit of all stakeholders. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of over 100 articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

End of 2004, he started authoring the book "The Groupness Factor" (see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm>) which got published in August 2005. Charlie's articles got printed in publications like Human Resources, FZ Magazine, Banking Today, SCMP, Effective Executive and CareerTimes.

Charlie is a founding member and President (2008/09) of the Hong Kong International Coaching Community.

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