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New Trend in Asia: C-level Executives Certified as Talent Coaches

By Charlie Lang, Founder and Managing Partner of Progress-U Asia

- Large organisations in Asia are increasingly getting their C-level executives certified as talent coaches as a means to build a strong talent pipeline and train key talent more successfully.
- Skilled coaching can make the difference between losing valuable talent and retaining competent employees with the potential to become C-level executives.

C-level executives with extensive professional experience are not necessarily adept at training a company's most talented employees. However, a growing number of C-level executives (such as CEO, CFO and COO) consider developing top talent in their organisations as an important part of their role. In the past four to five years in Asia, many executives are seeking talent coaching certifications to improve their training skills. Talent coaching can be defined as focused

professional training that leads and supports key talent in their career development.

Evidence for this recent trend in Asia is available in Progress-U's latest report, the *State of Corporate Coaching Culture in Asia*, which was based on answers from 236 companies. The report shows that companies, particularly larger organisations with over USD1 billion annual sales, are increasingly investing in getting their senior executives trained and certified as talent coaches,

with 60% of senior executives receiving coach training and certification.

The role of a professional coach

Most C-level executives who are trained and certified as professional coaches initially started coaching or mentoring talent without any specific training and felt that it didn't have as much impact as they hoped for. They then realised that having extensive leadership experience doesn't necessarily qualify them to be good coaches, and decided to get

professional coaching training.

Without any training in coaching, C-level executives often have a distorted understanding of what coaching really means. Coaching is not advising someone one-on-one; in fact, a professionally trained coach almost never gives any advice at all.

Coaching is designed to establish clear development goals that are considered useful by the coachee and then to guide the coachee through reflective conversations to improve their thinking. As a result, they realise how to make better choices and modify their behaviour in order to reach these goals faster than if they were left to their own devices. Another role of the coach is to keep the coachee accountable for their commitments in a non-directive manner.

An effective talent coach brings deeper self-awareness, a coaching mindset, extensive coaching skills, coaching processes and coaching tools to the table. This cannot be developed

sufficiently in a two to three day programme.

How to approach talent coaching

The research in the *State of Corporate Coaching Culture in Asia* report also shows that the closer coaching initiatives are linked to business objectives, the more likely they will result in a high return on investment. Likewise, during talent coaching, it's important that there is clarity about the overall talent development strategy, how talent coaching by senior executives fits into this strategy, and what business objectives should be achieved.

For talent coaching of C-level executives to be successful, companies need to ensure that:

- The C-level executives make a clear commitment in terms of time and resources to learn coaching on a professional level and to reserve sufficient time to coach the top talent.
- The talent are made aware that

they receive very valuable time from these busy executives and, as a result, need to take ownership of driving the talent coaching process.

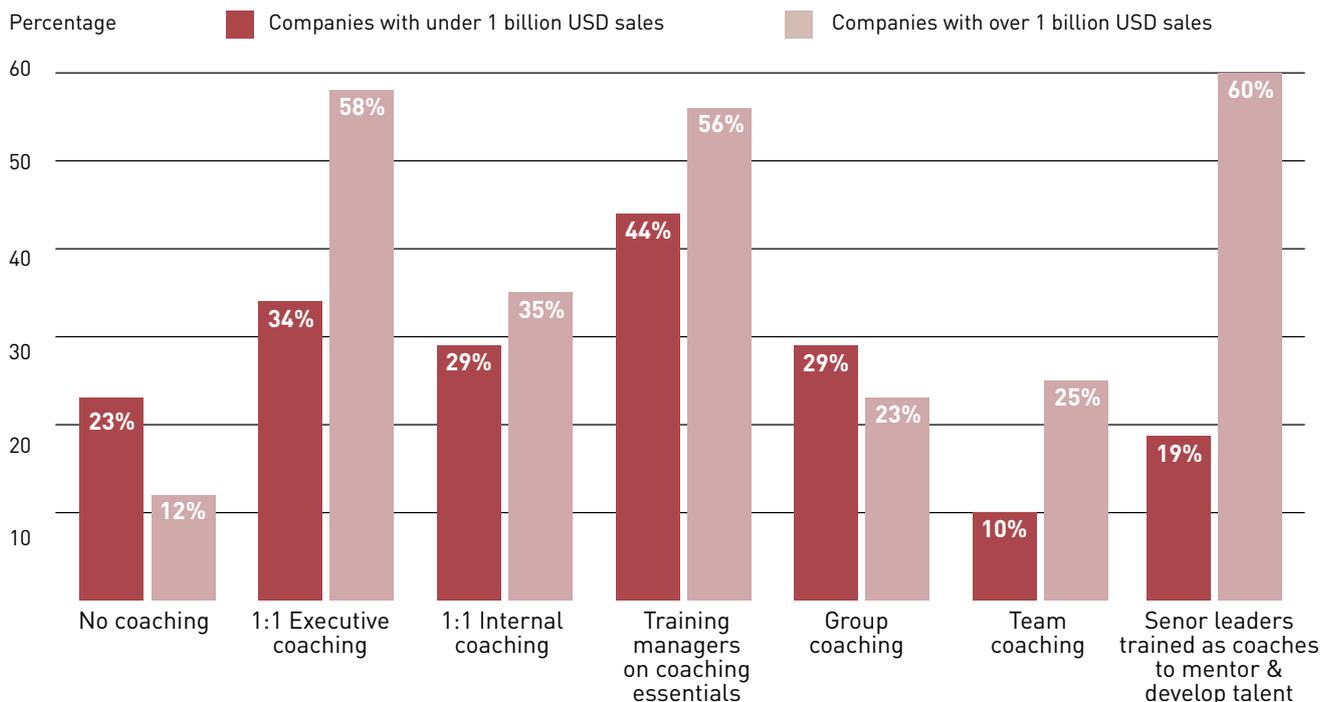
- HR supports the programmes and acts as a coordinator and moderator in case of any challenges during the roll-out. Ideally, there is also a simple contract between the talent coach and the coachee to formalise the structure and commitments.

Case study

Take the example of a large US-based technology corporation with strong presence in Asia. Like most other companies in their industry, they had been struggling for years to build a strong talent pipeline that would cater to their fast-increasing need for successors for senior management.

Based on their positive experience overseas of getting C-level executives trained in professional coaching to support the development of younger key talent, the management decided to replicate this approach in Asia.

Trend of corporate coaching culture in Asia



Source: State of Corporate Coaching Culture in Asia

They started in Greater China, the region with the strongest growth and biggest challenge of retaining talented executives.

Implementing this approach in this part of the world, a number of challenges had to be met, including the assurance of sufficient commitment from these leaders, and the avoidance of any friction between the talent coach and the line manager of the coachee.

To ensure that C-level executives would be committed to the process, management decided to invite them to take on this role on a voluntary basis. However, HR still had doubts if all those who volunteered would be sufficiently talented and determined to become effective coaches.

To tackle this question, company management decided to take it step by step.

The company arranged a short workshop held by their selected training institute to ensure that all those interested in becoming talent coaches would gain clarity on the learning outcomes and time investment. Six of the 18 initially



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Solid professional coach certification programmes include:

- Three to four seminars, including numerous real-life corporate coaching case studies
- Coaching practice assignments
- Reading assignments to solidify the theoretical understanding
- Extensive coaching practice supervision
- Coaching practice exams to evaluate the coaching ability
- Accreditation by international certification body to ensure high quality

interested executives dropped out after this workshop as they felt they could not make the necessary commitment.

The selected coach certification programme was organised as four two-day seminars with assignments and follow-up activities after each seminar. Participants were allowed to make the final decision on their willingness to study all four modules after completing the first one. This allowed the executives to find out if talent coaching was really suitable for them. Should they decide not to continue in their learning journey, they would still be able to apply some of the learning gained from the first module to hone their leadership skills.

Out of the 12 participants who completed the first module, nine decided to become internationally certified as a talent coach. After successful completion, the participants received the Registered Corporate

Coach certificate issued by the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC).

The company had established processes to identify their most important talent, but the HR ensured that the coach and selected talent were a good match. A “chemistry meeting” was organised between both parties before both would commit to working together. In case it did not work out, both talent coach and coachee could later opt out and ask for being matched with someone else.

Companies that have certified C-level executives coaching top talent are more likely to achieve higher retention rates of valuable employees. Without coaching, the company risks losing valuable talent that have the potential to become C-level executives. Coachees are more ready to take on senior roles once the opportunity presents itself. 