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Coaching, Executive Development

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to speed

COACHING TODAY'S EXECUTIVES

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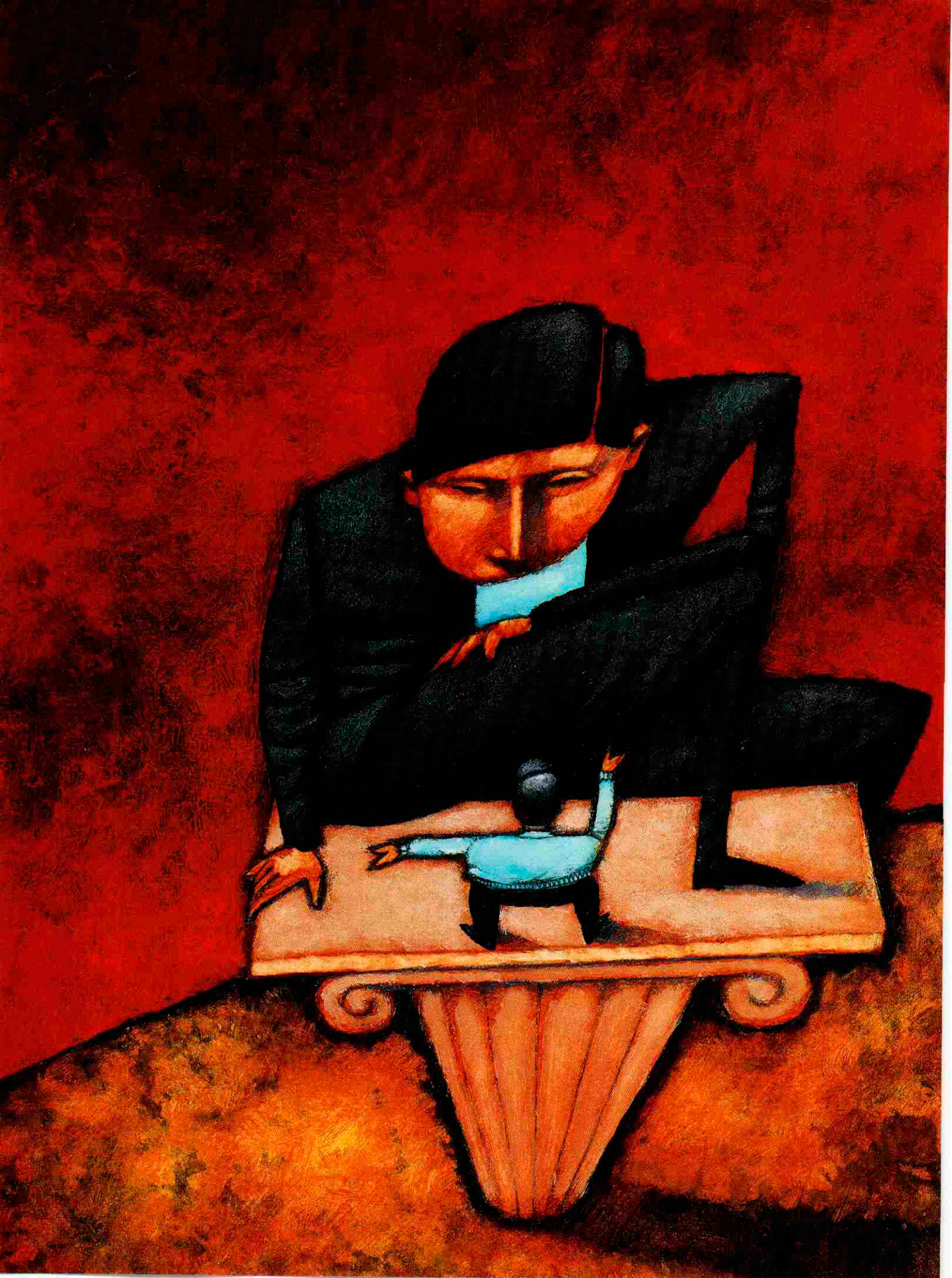
AH, TOP MANAGEMENT. The cream of the crop. The top of the hill. The highest rung of the ladder. The peak of the pyramid. The gals and gents who can do no wrong, right?

Wrong. If we've learned anything in the last two decades of business upheaval, it's that top management is as vulnerable, fallible, and, yes, even as insecure as the rest of us. The problem, however, is that we still don't like to admit it. "People surround the leaders to protect them instead of helping them grow," says Judith Katz, executive vice president of The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group in Washington, D.C. "As I look at leaders today, most are

tom about their jobs. They're not having fun."

"It truly is lonely at the top," confirms Tom Kiefer, CEO of Connect, a Minneapolis, Minnesota-based information technology consulting and services company that recently grew from entrepreneurial status to a company with more than 200 employees, throwing him into a leadership role he'd never prepared for. "Top management has to make tough decisions and we often don't have all the expertise we need, yet people expect us to be perfect."

Since the day the first craftsman turned to a peer for advice, top management has found ways



around this dilemma. Call them mentors, peers, friends, or even family, but in the end their role is the same—they're the people who give top management advice, the people who coach the executive on anything from meeting room manners to computer skills.

"You receive coaching from everybody," says Lynda Popwell, vice president of health, safety, environment, and quality for Eastman, the Kingsport, Tennessee-based chemical and manufacturing company. "For example, my sister reminds me not to forget the feminine part of myself, a fellow executive tells me to talk louder in meetings, and a coworker tells me when I'm losing my passion and need to return to the plant."

Executive coaching today

This type of informal coaching—combined with the occasional "charm school" or intensive graduate degree program for truly tough problems—has served most executives well over the years. Yet many companies are finding that today's fast-paced, ever-changing business world calls for more. "We've added a whole new set of directions now because we're dealing with a global world," says Katz. "Most people in leadership roles don't know how to lead in this environment. They can manage and they know how to use power, but they don't know how to create vision and a learning culture. The pressures have added arithmetically to the ways people have to lead and manage change."

"The skills required to manage in turbulence are very different from what is taught in business schools," adds Eric Dent, a consultant with the Washington, D.C.-based company Always Improvement. "You have to be flexible and adaptive, and have a broader perspective about everything. You have to value and use diversity effectively. We learn management as though the manager is the only person to take action, but in turbulent environments there's a lot of interdependency. This suggests that senior executives are more often learners than anything else."

Yet, "If we're going to change the corporation, we have to educate the corporation, and we have to start at the top," says Larry Dille, vice president of

education with UARCO, a Barrington, Illinois-based document management company with about 4,000 employees. "That's difficult because the people who got there arrived using different skills than the ones they need today."

Indeed, if today's executives turn to their friends for advice, they'll likely find people as confused by the new world as they are.

So, what's a company to do?

Instead of relying on serendipitous coaching and the executive's drive to take it to heart, many are trying to institutionalize executive coaching. And they have a multitude of ideas for how to go about it:

At Westinghouse's government and environmental services company in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, for example, executives no longer attend training courses, says Ray Frankowski, director of human resources. "In the past, we did succession planning—we put names in blocks. If you

■ Many companies are trying to institutionalize coaching ■

were slated to be a vice president of finance, you would take certain courses. We were spending a lot of money and not meeting the needs of the executives." After bringing a team of top executives together to discuss the best way to meet their developmental needs, the company created a new coaching tool. "We like to bring focus groups together to discuss a topic and feed back solutions," says Frankowski. "This more directly meets their needs and also gives us the flexibility to react quickly to a concern."

Arthur Andersen, an audit, tax, business advisory, and speciality consulting firm based in Chicago, Illinois, has initiated a similar program. Partners tell what they want to hear about, then the company sets up elective courses taught by national experts, usually university professors who weave in case studies as well as classical theory and current events. "Our partners needed and wanted broader information to help them deal with

CEOs and to become trusted business advisors," says Arthur Friedman, partner, Arthur Andersen partner development program. "This meets their needs far better than sending them to prescribed training programs."

At the same time, both of these companies take what has become a more standard approach to executive coaching. Executives periodically are assessed using a number of instruments that include surveys of peers, co-workers, and of 10 customers. The results are cross-referenced against a list of skills and behaviors desirable for today's leaders, and executives are encouraged to fill the gaps. "Today, rather than focus on positions on a chart, we focus on individuals," says Frankowski. "It takes more time but the results are better."

One federal organization specializing in systems research and development has gone even a step further, by bringing in an outside consultant as a coach and confidant to the senior management. "He can provide a mirror for the executives to see the impact of their behavior, give on-the-spot training, and help resolve conflicts," says the division head of employee and organization development. "We used him to support team building and strategic planning for several years before this coaching role evolved. The top guys tended to use him that way so we formalized the relationship. They like having a sounding board and a shadow consultant, someone they can call on the phone for feedback."

For example, says this division head, when the organization recently was restructured and two people who had formerly been peers suddenly were on different levels in the reporting chain, this coach helped smooth the way: "These two guys couldn't agree on anything and weren't communicating well. The coach interviewed other senior managers in the organization and used this feedback to help these two understand the effect of their conflict. He used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a framework for exploring their differences, and was able to show them how they were simply looking at the world differently, that they weren't intentionally trying to antagonize each other. The result was amazing. They still see issues different-

ly, but they have learned how to use this to their advantage."

Still other organizations increasingly turn to programs such as those offered by the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina. One program, with a \$35,000 price tag, assesses leadership potential and development concerns for the most senior executives, offering one-on-one coaching that can last up to 10 years. "We're seeing a demand for this type of program for executives at other levels in organizations, as well," says Lily Kelly-Radsord, director of the organization's leadership development program. "We're definitely seeing an industry spring up around the need to cope with the faster pace and constant change in business."

How to coach to the top

Executive coaching is a field in its infancy, so it's no surprise that companies and consultants are looking in all directions to find effective programs. Says Dent, "It's hard to know what will be a good learning experience for a business executive; it's kind of hit or miss in most organizations today." "Executive coaching is growing and changing as the needs of the executive wing are changing," adds UARCO's Dille. "This is like rewiring your house with the electricity on."

Still, these pioneering organizations have discovered a few things that can help others coach executives to better handle today's complex work environments. Some of their ideas are adapted from training programs for top executives, some are common sense, and others were discovered through hard-won trial and error. Among the things consultants, executives, and corporate human resources personnel recommend include:

Get corporate buy-in from the beginning. Executives may sense that today is different from ever before, but that doesn't mean they'll readily see the need for a change in the way they're coached. "Mostly, it requires a head-set change on the part of executives," says Gerald Jones, executive vice president of The Forum Corporation, a Boston, Massachusetts-based consulting firm. "Many executives have gotten their past development in ways that are different from what's required

for the future so they may not see a need for formal coaching. Most got there with on-the-job training, self development, and just being smart."

Getting buy-in from the executives is as easy—or as difficult—as tying the need for it to bottom-line objectives. "If executive development isn't tied to corporate objectives, kiss it goodbye because that's how they're measured, how they live, and how they're paid," says Dille. "You won't get the executive wing's attention if coaching doesn't meet a business need."

At Houston-based Tenneco Gas, a 3,000-employee division of Greenwich, Connecticut-based Tenneco, Janet Elliott, manager of training, says they keep the top executives' attention with a scorecard. Every month, they see the results of their efforts in such categories as financial performance, customer satisfaction, cost control, human resource management, and employee safety. The results are compared with agreed-upon objectives. Areas with significant gaps guide action plans for coaching. "From the standpoint of coaching, it simplifies the process," she says. "If a target isn't being met, we know what to work on.

And we have more buy-in because the executives have committed to the targets at the beginning of the year."

Dille prefers a more subtle approach, however. "Go to your customers, the executives, and ask them what would make them outstanding professionals a year from now." It's the tactic both Westinghouse and Arthur Andersen use to develop their executive education programs.

Another method Dille likes is telling "tribal" stories. "We got the officers together for a workshop on shared values and had them write two stories they tell their friends about the company. When they told those stories, it identified the behaviors they support and illustrated the value system in the company. Then we could begin discussing which behaviors to keep, which to eliminate, and which are missing."

Dille provides an example of how

this exercise led the entire executive team to make a cultural change: "We had an executive dining room. That's elitist behavior and we hadn't even thought of that," says Dille. "It seemed so petty yet things like this make a fabric, they're like the pieces of a quilt."

Remember that top executives won't open up overnight. Even when management is convinced coaching is a necessity, individuals invariably will be reluctant to bare their innermost insecurities to a complete stranger, or, worse yet, someone who works just down the hall. After all, they didn't attain this position by focusing on their weaknesses.

"It's hard to get U.S. executives to say in public that they're winging it," says Dent. "We have no appreciation for that here. We find it a weakness."

The dilemma becomes how to give executives exposure to new information without exposing them, adds Katz. "They can't ask for help publicly, so how do you help them deal with the competencies needed for a changing business strategy?"

In addition, remember that the executives may be under tremendous stress from these changes, notes Kelly-Radsord.

"We're talking about executives 40 to 50 years old. They grew up in a business world that was relatively steady, but now it's a faster-paced world with more change. That can be a very fearful transition for anyone, and especially for the leaders of an organization."

For these reasons, many organizations bring in outsiders to serve as coaches. "Top executives usually aren't receptive to doing something inside the organization because they set themselves apart," says Geoff Bellman, a management consultant with GMB Associated, Ltd., in Seattle, Washington. "As an internal trainer or human resources specialist, don't be offended when the executives don't want to work with you. It's not insulting, it's just a reality."

In fact, the external coach often can make quicker headway with a problem just because he or she has no allegiance to the company or the



ADVICE TO EXECUTIVES

Executive coaching just may be the best answer to many of the needs of today's executives. "The biggest benefits are speed and reliability," says Gerald Jones, executive vice president of The Forum Corporation. "You can get help immediately and you can get it in a way that works for you." Still, it takes some work on the executive's part. Here is what top executives and their coaches advise others to keep in mind:

Don't be afraid to ask. "Sometimes executives are reluctant to admit they don't know something, but you wouldn't be in the position if you weren't good, so don't be afraid to ask for help," says Tom Kiefer, CEO of Connect. "Some people will even be relieved to know you're not perfect."

Be open to the pain you might feel. Assessment instruments and candid interviews can be quite uncomfortable, especially for executives used to succeeding. "If you're going to grow as a person, you have to be open to coaching," says Lynda Popwell, vice president of health, safety, environment, and quality for Eastman. "You can't grow unless you realize that you are limited

by your own paradigms."

Start by knowing who you are. "Those executives who are clear about themselves and what they represent are more successful on a daily basis," says Geoff Bellman of GMB Associated, Ltd. "This is more important than where they are on the continuum of autocratic or participative. I see some highly autocratic executives who are quite successful."

Learn by doing. "I have learned a lot about myself by mentoring others," says Kiefer. "As I help someone else develop a management style, I find myself assessing my own style more closely."

Look everywhere for coaches. "A lot of meetings are serendipitous. They can create a better bond because they're more personal," says Kiefer. "There's always a good network of people to talk to about issues. I've joined a couple of groups where executives come together to share problems and concerns. I meet people at seminars and my kids' school activities. There's no shortage of places to turn to for advice."

Sometimes coaching comes from the most unexpected circumstances. "I learned a great deal about my

working style from taking golf lessons," says Popwell. "And one of my most memorable coaching episodes was taking beginning skiing lessons with a gentleman in his eighties who showed me the joy of continuing to try new things."

Popwell remembers an incident earlier in her career that showed the value of accepting coaching from anyone: "At Carolina Eastman, I was division superintendent and there was a spending cap. A team I was on made the decision to pave a parking area but a plant operator said we could have spent the money better by putting in new control valves, and he was right. I learned a lot from that coaching."

Offer something in trade. When you're turning to an informal coach, Kiefer says it's crucial to reciprocate or at least to be willing to offer something in return. "It has to be a two-way dialogue," he says. "I'm happy to share ground I've already plowed. In my case, many executives need coaching on computer systems, and they're reluctant to ask for it internally so they turn to me. In exchange, I can ask them how they've solved fast-growth problems in their companies."

individual executive. "If you're internal, how do you help a leader and not succumb to his or her leadership role?" Katz asks. "As an external consultant, I have more leeway. I'm not bound by the organizational structure and my future in the organization."

Still, Katz says, even external coaches won't develop instant rapport with executives. "You have to work to develop the trust and safety to be honest and clear. That doesn't happen right off the bat. I never say I'm their coach. I make it natural. They're my client and I see my role as helping them through the change process. At some point, they start calling me on their own."

This doesn't leave insiders out of the loop, however. These consultants suggest that the internal training and development staff become a resource for the

executive by connecting with the people outside the company that the executive is working with. It helps them stay in touch with the executive's needs. At the same time, internal trainers often are the best to set up seminars and discussion groups that meet the needs of several executives at once.

You'll have to convince them there's a problem. All of this is great if the executive is ready for the coaching. However, in many cases, executives simply can't see their own problems, especially when they're being asked to change behaviors that worked well in the past. "If there's no sense of urgency on the part of the executive to get this type of coaching, it simply won't happen," says Jones from The Forum Corporation. Adds Kelly-Radsford: "You can't let the person in need define the need because they may be

seeing through a flawed lens."

As a result, perhaps the most important role of a coach, whether internal or external, is to convince the executive there's a problem. John Zondlo calls this pre-coaching. He is senior human resources development consultant with Presbyterian Healthcare Services in Albuquerque, New Mexico. "We had one executive who wasn't empowering people, and we discovered it in the exit interviews when people quit working for him. That was a sign to sit down and determine if the executive sees the need."

If the executive still doesn't see the problem, it's time to turn to assessment instruments. Most organizations that are looking at executive coaching use instruments that evaluate an individual's skills from the perspective of peers, subordinates, and customers.

Before conducting the assessment, Zondlo asks the executives to write a few sentences describing their leadership style. After the results are in, he asks them to write another self-evaluation from the others' perspectives and then to compare the two to identify the gaps. That's where you get fertile ground to work on; the priority is the largest gap.

Some employee development experts also use a leadership "quiz," especially for technical people who suddenly are thrust into management positions. "It can help them become aware of what they don't know about being a good leader, such as how important communication skills are," says Zondlo. "You can fill that learning gap with workshops, and so forth."

While these two instruments are favorites of many consultants, the key is to provide information, says Bellman. "You have to make sure they're ripe for change, and you can help ripen them by giving them data they didn't have. In most cases you're dealing with people who are relatively successful. Help them understand what works and what gets in the way."

Coaching usually deals with subtle issues. To make matters even more complicated, executive coaches say they rarely work with executives to change behaviors or increase their understanding of areas that are cut and dried. After all, if the executives need more computer skills, they can probably call one of their informal coaches and find out how to fill that need. Likewise, if they're extremely dictatorial in a corporate culture that values teamwork and empowerment, chances are it won't be long before they shave off the roughest edges of their management style.

Today's issues are more interpersonal and fuzzy. "Part of the leadership role is to help people be comfortable with the level of change so they can lead," says Kelly-Radsord. "They can't close down and become scared themselves. Consequently, you're usually working with them to change behaviors, not their personality. You're adding to their repertoire."

"This is an especially important time for executives to have a lot of clarity about who they are, what they represent, and how they are seen by the

GOING RIGHT TO THE SOURCE

Arthur Andersen surveyed the firm's partners, asking them to identify the topics on which they wanted training. The partners primarily wanted information on CEO/CFO relationships and their roles as business advisors.

This survey led to four training themes:

- ▶ business perspective
- ▶ business development
- ▶ leadership and values
- ▶ interpersonal values.

The specific courses for 1996 are:

- ▶ Foundations for Enhancing Client Relationships
- ▶ Strategic Management
- ▶ Dynamics of Market Leadership: From the CEO's Perspective
- ▶ Managing Innovation: From the CEO's Perspective
- ▶ Global Financial Management
- ▶ Leadership and High-Performance Teams: A Follow-up to Foundations
- ▶ Advanced Negotiation: Managing Client Relationships.

people they're working with," adds Bellman. "Executives need clarity about themselves. They must understand the effect they're having on others before they can do something with that information. Usually they just need fine tuning. Help them see areas in which to grow that would be useful to them."

Bellman gives the example of a financial executive who was a perfectionist. He'd put together extremely detailed reports. When management invariably changed the recommendations, he'd punish himself and his employees. "I helped him move his emphasis from input to output of management information. He needed to see what his true role was in this setting. It was a simple and profound shift of perspectives for him."

Steer clear of formal training. "Training is the course of last resort," says Bellman. "This is the second half of their life. They've already had a lot of training."

Instead, the best method for coaching executives is to let them help de-

cide how they like to get the information or experience. Consider volunteer work, job or assignment rotations, books, and seminars. Have the executives identify friends in companies dealing with change, interview them, then come back and have a dialogue. Have them present a seminar on the exact area they're trying to change. Have them mentor another employee.

They'll need prodding. It's human nature to resist change. Even when you've convinced someone it's important, work pressures and heavy schedules can put any development plan on the back burner. "The individual may be motivated but the desire will fade if someone isn't held accountable, preferably the executive's direct supervisor, even if that means turning to the chairman of the board," says Zondlo. "Establish target dates and deadlines or they will muddle through with behaviors that have worked in the past because they need to get their day-to-day job done."

Be ready for anything. If your role is to coach an executive, or even if you're an internal trainer who's supporting an external coach, the experience likely will take you to arenas you've never before entered. "When you counsel someone, you open yourself to a work and life arena far beyond a training program," says Bellman. "This is a life encounter with a work overlay."

Adds Katz: "It surpasses a professional relationship. You get to know this person on a level that goes beyond work, and sometimes even beyond what his or her family knows. You find out innermost concerns. It often ends up being a growing experience for everyone involved." ■

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