



Executive Coaching vs. Leadership Coaching: What's the Difference?

By Jenna Ghisolfo, Founder of Still Standing in Heels Consulting

Organizations often use the terms **executive coaching** and **leadership coaching** interchangeably. Both are powerful tools for professional growth, but they are not always the same experience. Understanding the difference can help an organization choose the right type of coaching for a new manager, a high-potential leader, a senior executive, or an entire leadership team.

What Is Executive Coaching?

Executive coaching is typically designed for senior leaders whose decisions influence an organization at a high level. An **executive coach** works one-on-one with a leader to strengthen strategic thinking, executive presence, communication, decision-making, influence, accountability, and the ability to lead through complexity.

The work is often highly individualized. A CEO, executive director, vice president, or department head may be managing growth, organizational change, board relationships, difficult personnel decisions, competing priorities, or the pressure of being the person everyone expects to have the answer. Executive coaching creates a confidential space to examine those challenges, identify blind spots, and turn insight into action.

What Is Leadership Coaching?

Leadership coaching has a broader application and can support leaders at many stages of their careers. It may be especially valuable for emerging leaders, newly promoted supervisors, managers building their first teams, or experienced professionals who want to strengthen specific leadership skills.

Leadership coaching often focuses on practical development areas such as delegation, feedback, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, communication, team accountability, employee engagement, and transitioning from individual contributor to leader. It can be an important part of a larger **leadership development** strategy because it helps participants apply what they learn to real situations in their workplace.

The Biggest Difference: Scope and Context

The clearest distinction is usually the level and context of the challenges being addressed. Leadership coaching often develops the skills required to lead people effectively. Executive coaching frequently goes a step further by addressing the organizational, strategic, political, and high-stakes responsibilities that come with senior leadership.

Leadership coaching asks: How can I become a stronger leader?

Executive coaching asks: How can I lead effectively at this level, with these responsibilities, and create the organizational impact expected of me?

Where the Two Overlap

There is significant overlap. A senior executive may need help improving communication or managing conflict, while a mid-level leader may be preparing for an executive role and need to develop strategic presence. Strong coaching should not force a leader into a rigid category. The engagement should be shaped around the person's responsibilities, goals, strengths, challenges, and the results the organization needs.

Which Type of Coaching Does Your Organization Need?

Consider executive coaching when a leader is responsible for major organizational decisions, navigating significant change, preparing for a larger role, struggling with executive presence, or needing an objective strategic thought partner. Consider leadership coaching when the primary goal is to strengthen day-to-day people leadership, prepare high-potential employees for advancement, support newly promoted managers, or build stronger leadership habits across multiple levels of the organization.

For many organizations, the best answer is not choosing one or the other. A thoughtful leadership development program can use both: leadership coaching to build a strong pipeline of capable managers and executive coaching to help senior leaders perform effectively at the highest levels.

What Effective Coaching Should Produce

Regardless of the label, coaching should lead to measurable growth. Leaders should leave the process with greater self-awareness, clearer priorities, stronger communication, practical strategies, and specific actions they can use immediately. The goal is not simply to have good conversations. The goal is to create stronger leaders who make better decisions, build healthier teams, and produce meaningful results.

A Customized Approach at Still Standing in Heels Consulting

At Still Standing in Heels Consulting, we believe effective coaching begins with the leader in front of us. We tailor coaching around the individual's role, organizational environment, goals, and real-world challenges rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all formula. Whether someone needs executive coaching, leadership coaching, or a broader leadership development experience, the focus remains practical: build confidence, strengthen leadership capability, and create impact that extends beyond the coaching session.

The strongest leaders are not the ones who believe they have nothing left to learn. They are the ones willing to keep developing as their responsibilities grow. The right coaching relationship gives them the perspective, accountability, and strategy to do exactly that.

SEO focus: executive coaching • leadership coaching • executive coach • leadership development