

Executive Coaching – The Diversity Training Group Way

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In my nearly 25-year career as a Diversity and Inclusion Trainer, Diversity Strategist, Expert Witness, Sexual Harassment Prevention Trainer, Mentoring and Trust Trainer and Executive Coach, I have never seen the demand for our "coaching and 360 assessment services" explode like they have the last several months. Why? What is happening here?

I think organizations are finally starting to figure out that training an entire department or organization "to mask the real target" of the educational initiative is a waste of time and money. What do I mean? How many times have I been told by our client – "the person(s) who really needed this training the most, 'never showed' and we offered this training regularly for a long period of time?" Well, my response has always been – "maybe he/she needs some 1:1 special attention" or in other words – coaching and a related 360 assessment. We also know that too many organizations in the last economic downturn cut their training and especially their executive coaching budgets to the bone or completely. We are seeing a big turn-around.

In the past some of our clients have hired DTG in response or reaction to a particular "diversity or exclusionary moment of truth." A behavior, a comment (or series – pattern or pathology) or email or some other situation that needs "immediate attention" triggers our client to call us. I am usually told – "You have a half day or full day to meet this person and then tell us whether we fire him/her or not." Crazy, right? Well, often these situations are ugly, compliance-driven, but they are not developmental. Is this person "save able or salvage-able" is what their employer asks us.

Well, I am happy to report we are getting the more "pro-active, long-term, developmental work." Organizations have realized it is time to invest in their top assets – rising executives, high potentials, who might have a blind spot or two. A blind spot – an unconscious or subconscious bias or prejudice that this person is unaware of, yet his or her peers and subordinates are well aware of. The gap between how the coaching candidate thinks they come across and how they actually come across is too wide and widening for their employer and this person is valuable or important so the employer commits some coaching resources to this rising star. Presently, DTG is involved in long-term executive coaching processes with over a dozen executives in a half dozen not-for-profit, for-profit and government organizations. This is a fantastic development showing us the employer "cares" about the long-term development of their executives and wants to ensure their success and not failure.

How many organizations do not provide supervisory, managerial or leadership training and development for their employees – they just promote the "smartest, best performer" and hope they are a natural born supervisor, manager and leader. Look, I have said many times in my past articles – "I believe too many people can barely supervise or manage people like themselves, let alone people that are different." Now you have to ask the more complicated question – "Can your high potential future leader talent lead, inspire, influence people that are different?" Remember that without followers there are no leaders. So we have clients that are identifying high potentials, high risers and they want to invest in their talent and they ask us to come in and add value.

Our clients want to ensure that their present and future leaders are inclusive, that they are self-aware (not a legend in their own mind) of how they supervise, manage, and lead – how they may come across. Remember the gap between intent and impact – they might not intentionally want to come across as "exclusive" but their actions are sending a different, more exclusionary message. Do their subordinates, peers and superiors see them as an inclusive manager/leader that values all of the diversity of their very talented direct reports or is this person coming across as more of an exclusive manager/leader?

So we are brought in and we partner and collaborate with our clients to identify everyone we will interview (1:1 interviews) in support of a subsequent executive coaching curriculum. We will of course interview everyone pertinent horizontally and vertically in the organization chain but we also target clients/customers (internal, external). Here are some of the questions we pose in our "data gathering phase" of our executive coaching process. The person we are coaching often reviews the questions and adds value – maybe there is a particular area that they are really interested in us "drilling out." We often focus on the difference between managing and leading – two very different but related sets of competencies and skills.

My Top 13 Questions:

1. Describe the workplace, the work environment in your office? How does leadership set "the tone" in the office?

2. Do your leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce? Yes or no, and please explain. (*Trick question really, we believe managers create an environment where people motivate themselves and leaders of course, can inspire.*)

3. As a leader, what do you admire and respect about your superior?

4. As a leader, where could he/she improve?

5. As a manager, what do you like and respect about your superior?

6. As a manager, where could they improve?

7. Do we honor our mission and core values in this organization? True or False - please explain. (*We do have clients that don't have core values and we help them develop their core values*).

8. Describe your level of engagement with your work, your peers, and your superior? (*We believe there is a high correlation between how you are treated, how you are valued and how engaged and productive you will be in your work*).

9. How does your leader/manager create the environment for your level of engagement? Do they create a motivating, positive environment? Yes or no, please explain. Do you trust your superior?

10. What behaviors do you witness that create a positive, motivating environment? What we call the "PREFERS" – behaviors we prefer to witness and experience in your workplace environment.

11. What behaviors do you witness that create a negative, de-motivating environment? What we call the "NEVERS" – behaviors we never want to witness and experience in our workplace environment.

12. Please be as specific as possible. Behaviorally, your superior ...

- a. What he/she should **STOP** doing (one behavior/action that would make the greatest impact)
- b. What he/she should **START** doing (one behavior/action that would make the greatest impact)
- c. What he/she should **CONTINUE** doing (one behavior/action this person has exhibited all along)

13. Anything else you would like to tell me – please take advantage of this process, this opportunity. Any question I did not ask that you would like to bring up now?

No secret, once you have the answers – we share them (carefully, delicately) with the object of the coaching anonymously – no attribution. We do not include the identity of the person being interviewed anywhere in the data gathering or reporting – makes it safer for everyone. Sharing raw data can be brutal but at the same time revitalizing.

One last observation I want to share with you – often the organization can ask these questions internally but for some reason, employees do not share or participate or speak up until "an outsider" – a third party, an objective or neutral party is brought in to ask the same questions. Human Resources will tell me – "We talked to people, we conducted a quick audit or investigation and they did not tell us anything that you identified."

This is why consultants will never go out of business. My diagnosis – trust issues, they don't trust the organization for whatever reason but they do trust an outsider. Trust is at the center of so much of my work. That "sweet spot" between respect, valuing diversity, being more inclusive, trust, engagement and high performance is where our work is gravitating toward. If you have not read S.M.R. Covey's book – The Speed of Trust, please go and pick it up. Fantastic book! He is the son of Stephen Covey.

Hey, if there are questions you are asking that are missing from our list – please share them. I am always open to suggestions. Any feedback is welcome. We are all in this together!

At your service,

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