

## How a coach can boost your career

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*Janine Everson is academic director of the Centre*

In an increasingly complex and fast-moving world, managers need all the support they can get.

In South Africa, this gap has been filled by an ever-expanding corps of coaches. Who are these people? And what can they do for you?

A coach isn't a therapist, a friend, a mentor or a counsellor, says Judy Goodwin, a change consultant and coach in Cape Town. The focus of coaching is on achieving specific goals.

"While you will be encouraged to share your past experiences, the emphasis is on the future and removing particular roadblocks from your career path." A coach will help you build specific skills that will bolster your professional performance, says Goodwin.



Janine Everson is academic director of the Centre for Coaching at the UCT Graduate School of Business. (Picture: Supplied)

In general, there are two kinds of executive coaching, says Janine Everson, academic director of the Centre for Coaching at the UCT Graduate School of Business. The first is remedial coaching. This is when a manager is creating problems, and may be completely out of their depth and misaligned. "Turning to a coach when everyone is at the end of their tether is never ideal."

The second, and most successful, kind of coaching is when a manager is feeling challenged, and may be in a "stretch" position: a job that is currently beyond their skill level. A coach can help to equip you with what is needed to do the job well.

Don't wait for a crisis before contacting a coach. Instead, consider coaching when you are not feeling entirely up to dealing with the challenges of your job. "Especially when feelings of inadequacy get in the way of your performance, and start to hijack your focus, you should consider getting a coach on board," says Everson.

Other signs you may need a coach:

- When it is starting to feel like Groundhog Day in your career, you may need help to break out of it, says Everson. An alarm bell should go off if an uncomfortable pattern is emerging: for example, if you constantly get into trouble for certain behaviours, if you often struggle to relate to your team, or if you always have a jerk for a boss.

- If you have time management problems, or struggle to find a balance between life and work, a coach can help you become more efficient and address the stressors in your career.

- Coaching can also help managers who want to move on to the next level of leadership, says Goodwin. "Coaching can work for anyone who knows they can do a lot better, who is not satisfied with their current performance and has a bigger dream," says Asanda Gcoyi, who coaches high-potential employees and is CEO of the employee development and recruitment firm CB Talent.

How does coaching work?

The approach will depend on the needs of a client. Gcoyi typically starts with a two-hour diagnostic session with a new client, during which their strengths are assessed and objectives are established.

Goals are critical in coaching. Unlike therapy and mentoring, coaching is exclusively focused on achieving specific objectives.

These could include a whole range of goals, for example achieving a better performance, being more assertive (or calm), managing or engaging your team, or working on your motivation levels. While greater self-awareness will often be part of achieving these goals, your coach is not a sounding board, adviser or a teacher.

Instead, the coach should equip you with specific skills to help you achieve your goals.

In order to achieve these goals a coach will work to develop the client's levels of self-awareness around their subtle, often unconscious habitual patterns of behaviour and how these support and hinder them, says Everson. "And then a coach has to work on developing the actual skills and capabilities of the coachee so they can adopt new patterns of behaviour. New habits that slowly develop into new unconscious behaviours that feel natural and authentic."

The relationship with your coach will typically have an end-date, and won't continue indefinitely. The coaching sessions are typically intensive for the first few weeks, and then less frequent as the client works on achieving goals. A large part of coaching is holding the client accountable to do the work for themselves, says Gcoyi. While everyone is different, it can take three to six months before behaviours start to shift in a meaningful way, says Goodwin.

How do you choose a coach?

The coaching sector is relatively unregulated. Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (Comensa), established 10 years ago, has embarked on a professionalisation of the industry. Currently, however, the gold standard is an accreditation from the International Coach Federation (ICF). ICF coaches have completed courses that have been certified by the organisation.

To find the right person for you, Everson says personal referrals can be useful. Get references and also scrutinise the coach's CV to see whether they have the skills that will help you. Get a sense of where the person has worked and confirm their qualifications. The latter is crucial, she says. Many so-called coaches will punt their experience – "30 years in HR" or "extensive consulting work" – but don't have any credible (e.g. ICF-certified) coach-specific training.

Goodwin recommends having a coffee with a prospective coach to make sure you are a good match. "It has to be someone you will trust." There should be chemistry between you: your interaction should not be forced and you should feel understood.

These days, many companies offer coaching as part of their employee wellness programme, or as part of professional training.

An intervention often works best with people who ask their company for a coach, rather than those who have coaching forced on them, adds Gcoyi. "If it's part of a KPA, often coaching just becomes a box-ticking exercise."

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