

Personal development a key to coaching

THE demand for executive coaching skills has gained momentum and shifted from being regarded as a remedial intervention to a credible means of personal development.

"In the early days having a coach was something people kept under wraps, but now they're excited about it," says Janine Everson, academic director of the Centre for Coaching based at UCT's Graduate School of Business.

"It is not uncommon for people being appointed to senior board level to be assigned an executive coach — it's seen as an integral part of the settling in and promotion process."

Everson says executives can be promoted to positions for which they have technical competence but lack the necessary people skills.

"Coaching gives them a tailored development plan to improve and

enhance their practical leadership capability by getting them to understand their own emotional and physiological responses.

"People don't think of business as an emotional event, but it is. All business decisions and processes happen in the context of a relationship and usually in an emotional context. Very few people are trained or given any support or development along this nebulous line. They call it the soft stuff but it's the stuff without which you'll struggle to lead."

She says various coaching education options are available, depending on what one is trying to achieve.

"We get two kinds of delegates, broadly speaking. The first wants to learn how to coach so they can set up a practice and become an

independent coach. The other kind is people who want to learn how to lead in a coaching way. They see it as a process of personal development, coupled with gaining a new skill or competence.

"If you want to learn how to coach you have to learn how to understand yourself better. A large component of personal development, personal insights and personal coaching happens when you teach people how to coach others."

There is a plethora of coaches out there, says Everson, but because there is no accreditation process or overseeing agency for coaching education in SA people must do their homework before choosing.

"Firstly, check whether the programme is internationally recognised by a reputable agency.

"Secondly, speak to delegates

who have completed the programme.

"Thirdly, choose an institution that understands what coaching is and how it can support the learning process. The programme must be experiential in nature — it must be something that you practise actively in the class. And finally, it is important that you understand the philosophical approach and style of coaching that each school offers."

Everson says the single biggest challenge with coaching is finding opportunities to practise the skills.

"You can only get better at coaching by doing it. You need access to people and you need to have the time.

"We have senior executives who are incredibly busy but somehow they find the time to do it; they are aware of the value in it so they make the time," she says.

