

Can a CEO Really Benefit From Hiring a Coach?

January 2022

A July 2013 study published by the Stanford University Graduate School of Business found that nearly two-thirds of CEO's do not receive outside leadership advice – BUT – nearly all of those surveyed say they want it. The Stanford survey attributes this to the “it’s lonely at the top” syndrome that most C-level executives suffer under. They may know they need help, or they feel that they might benefit from some kind of coaching, but they are unable or unwilling to admit that need in such a demonstrable way. Their ego won’t allow for it.



If we look one level lower, to executive-level executives, the numbers do not get much better with nearly 50% stating they have *never* received any formalized coaching or leadership training since attaining senior-level management status. Again nearly 100% state that they would like to receive coaching to enhance their leadership development – and to bring a further feeling of job enrichment to the position – but they are unable to “justify” the cost of such remedial education in time or money. After all, what does it say to ownership is they admit they need, want or would benefit from coaching? It might cost them their job!

So, why do CEOs and other senior leaders say they want coaching but don't seek it?

Ironically, the answer to this question came during a recent analysis and follow-up of the data obtained from a totally unrelated study by Geoff Ashley & Associates of executive perceptions of the *Key Business Issues Facing Companies*. The data would seem to indicate that there is a misconception as to what leadership or executive coaching provides versus what executives feel they need. It can be thought of as the disconnect between “hard” and “soft” skills development which is an issue that has become MUCH larger than first anticipated.

When the study began, GAA was convinced that there was a need for most businesses to start contemplating the potential for a change in their business model. This business model disconnect seems to span all industry segments, all company sizes and it is a global phenomenon. It is being driven and fueled by some very basic, fundamental and dominating changes to the way that consumers research, purchase, and inform others of their experiences. The changes impact us all and they are having an even more dramatic impact on those organizations that sell services along with their products. It seemed to focus on the need for companies to completely rethink their idea of what the “customer experience” looks like? What could be more complex and more strategic than a fundamental change to the business model? The answer was very enlightening and no less complex or strategic!



Of Course I Understand...

In study after study, GAA has found data to support our contention that the C-Level disconnect between executives and the consumer, as well as the executive and their employees is quickly approaching critical mass. It is the executives of the organization that set the vision, demand accountability of the employees, create the corporate culture, set the goals, create the business plans and **drive** the need for change (if any is to happen). With all of this on their shoulders, changing the business model alone is likely to fail if the senior-most executives of the organization don't have the skills necessary or the basic understanding of the motivations, needs, requirements and very real differences in their various constituent groups (prospects, customers, partners, shareholders, employees, etc.). The world has changed dramatically and the decision-makers have not changed with it. They may think they have, but the data just does not support that fact.

“Soft Skills” Versus “Hard Skills”

Most executives would consider investing in training on “hard skills” that they feel would help them in their role. These could be the acquisition of “badges” or product certifications. Maybe working with the accounting firm to better understand accounting and the impact of deferred revenue. It might be training on specific technologies involved in the company's solutions. There is no doubt that all of this training is valuable. But none of this training is likely to have as dramatic an impact on the organization or its customers, employees, partners and shareholders as improving their skills and effectiveness in the areas of:

- How to effectively question
- Self-awareness regarding ones strengths and weaknesses
- Understanding personal motivations
- A willingness to invest in personal growth
- Truly understanding how people are motivated versus how you are motivated and being able to acknowledge and embrace those differences
- Knowing when to “get out of the way”
- Empowering others to exceed expectations
- Traits of exceptional leaders
- Becoming a Master of Incremental Time Management
- How to be an effective role model

Back to the Stanford study. It was very interesting to note that CEO's stated they are very interested in training on conflict management and effective communications. Yet those same executives put the need for compassion, relationship and persuasion skills almost at the bottom of their list of “needed skills”. They considered them “ancillary at best”.



According to Douglas LaBier, Ph.D., a business psychologist and psychotherapist, “The higher up you go in companies, the more you're dealing with psychological and relational issues. Successful CEO leadership requires astuteness about others: their emotional and strategic personal drivers; their self-interest, overt and covert. These relationship competencies rest on a foundation of self-knowledge, self-awareness. And you can't know the truth about another without knowing it about yourself.”

Can You Be Powerful AND Empathetic?

Maybe we are asking too much of our executives? Is it possible that being the one in power makes it impossible to be empathetic to the needs of the organization and all of its various stakeholders? Two studies were conducted on this idea and they shed some light on this key question:

According to a study by Adam D. Galinsky at the Northwestern Kellogg School of Management; increased power tends to make a person more self-centered and self-absorbed. People in power tend to dismiss those who lack authority. ([source:](#)) High-power individuals “anchor too heavily on their own perspectives and demonstrate a diminished ability to correctly perceive others' perspectives.” This data fully supports the data uncovered by GAA in study after study comparing management’s perceptions of employee motivations versus the employees perceptions. As the Northwestern study concluded, “as power increases, power-holders are more likely to assume that others' insights match their own.” This is an incredibly dangerous perspective to have in today’s world.

Dr. LaBier cited another [recent study](#), where he found the same results when looking at the brain activity of people in power. [“They found](#) that increased power diminishes the ability to be empathic and compassionate because power appears to affect the ‘mirror system’ of the brain, through which one is ‘wired’ to experience what another person is experiencing. Researchers found that even the smallest bit of power shuts down that part of the brain and the ability to empathize with others.”

Executives Take Note:

It is so important that executives read and comprehend this data. As Dr. LaBier put it; “empathy, compassion and overall self-awareness are qualities of a developed, mature mind.” To succeed you need to have all of your wits about you. Your responsibilities are broad and as a result, there are an almost unlimited number of decisions that require your input. They cannot be deferred and they cannot be avoided. As a result, shouldn’t you do whatever you can to ensure you approach all of these opportunities with an appropriate perspective and attitude?



Geoff Ashley & Associates

Specialist in Business Transformation

Don't be afraid to look outside for help. A different perspective could be worth the investment by itself! But if you approach business consulting with the idea that you may benefit from combining "soft skills" with your already exceptional "hard skills", the business prospects for your organization are looking better and better!

Geoff Ashley & Associates is different. We specialize in working with ERP publishers, VAR's, ISV's and OEM's. With 40-years experience in ERP, our coaching and consulting as a very real-world component to it. We have "been there and done that". My associates within GAA have come from the VAR world. Most have worked or lead VAR organizations. We have created and delivered hundreds of workshops, courses and individual sessions to VAR principals, owners and executives. Our perspectives come from your world. Give us a call:

Geoff Ashley & Associates

Phone: +1 603 714 8180

Email: info@gaa-us.com

Web: www.gaa-us.com