

# Does Your Employee Qualify for Coaching?

By

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How often have we heard, “Our people are our greatest asset”? The facts tell a different story. Only *some* people are true assets. The point is to spot them, nurture them...and know when to leave them alone. These people will make the difference between surviving and thriving—between outrunning your competition and tripping at the finish line.

But the success won't happen automatically. The true assets in your chain of command will need help—but not just any help—focused, specific assistance that will equip them to attain the next level of success—theirs, their team's, and the organization's. Often an external coach can offer support, but you'll want to make sure you're spending your coaching dollars wisely. Qualifying top candidates is the first step in this process.

Let's start with people who automatically *don't* qualify for coaching. First, the “at risk” employee won't usually benefit from coaching. If your leadership, feedback, and mentoring haven't caused this person to change his or her behavior, how much success can you realistically expect from an external coach?

Similarly, if you have given up on this employee, don't spend your coaching dollars. You're probably trying to placate your guilt, even while you realize the inevitability that you'll end up firing this person. For more than thirty years, I have coached hundreds of leaders for thousands of hours, and I've saved exactly two “at risk” employees. Spend your coaching dollars on those who will benefit.

Next, people who don't want a coach shouldn't have one. Development demands change—often drastic, uncomfortable change. The unmotivated simply won't respond to feedback or a coach's suggestions. Hiring a coach for someone who doesn't plan to change behavior is tantamount to buying a gym membership for someone that doesn't intend to use it.

Finally, people with an integrity violation should be fired, not coached. Not even the world's best coach can make someone more ethical, and once people give you a reason not to trust them, you usually won't in the long term.

Those who do qualify distinguish themselves and exemplify the *E<sup>5</sup> Virtuosity Model: Ethics, Expertise, Excellence, Enterprise, and Experience*. They force people to take them seriously. They don't raise the bar—they set it for everyone else. They serve as gold standards of what people should strive to be and attain. If you were to scour the world, you'd be hard-pressed to find people who do their jobs better. You wouldn't hesitate to hire them again, and you'd be crushed if you found out they were leaving.

It all starts with an ethical foundation. Integrity is not a raincoat you put on when situations indicate you should. It is a condition that guides your life—not just a set of protocols. Those who qualify for coaching don't acquire their ethical foundations solely by learning general rules. They also develop them through practice. In short, they *exemplify* and model ethics in their personal and professional lives.

Good coaching candidates also evidence expertise, which has four critical constructs: intelligence, talent, knowledge, and consistency of performance. In business, the most crucial forecaster of executive success is leadership intelligence, or the specific cognitive abilities that equip us to make decisions and solve problems. As you evaluate a candidate for coaching, ask

yourself whether the person has consistently demonstrated the intellectual horsepower to advance. Coaching can change behavior, but it won't alter basic smarts.

Although required, expertise is not enough. Even when people possess world-class talent, they must practice and hone their skills routinely and religiously. What makes us excellent? It all starts with talent, but that's just a start. You should also see evidence that the person possesses the passion, knowledge, and discipline to take that talent to the next level. In other words, we're back to recognizing the absolute requirement that the person want to work with a coach to improve.

Then, you'll want to make sure the person is enterprising and resourceful. A willingness to work hard and a high-energy, go-getter approach define "enterprising." A competitive spirit, a "can do" attitude, self-discipline, reliability, and focus further augment it. In the long run, only self-starters respond favorably to coaching. You'll want to feel confident that once the coaching engagement ends the person will carry on the lessons learned and apply them.

Finally, you'll need to assess the candidate's experience as it relates to readiness to work with a coach. No hard and fast rule exists to determine the experience a person should have before working with a coach, but in general, I recommend coaching before a major change. Usually, this means the candidate will be promoted in the next couple of years or will take on new responsibility relative to a promotion or job change. If a person has never worked with a coach, hiring one before the candidate advances to the "C suite" is advisable.

People often ask me, "Can executives really change their behavior?" The answer is definitely "yes" as long as the desired change truly involves changing *behavior*, not emotions, integrity, motivation, personality, or cognitive abilities—since all resist change. From an

organizational perspective, the fact that the executive wants to change leadership behavior may be even more important than what he or she actually aspires to change. That's why I concentrate my coaching efforts on candidates who demonstrate both the desire and ability to change those behaviors that will help them serve as leadership role models in the organization, and I recommend you do the same.