The power of coaching to improve your daily life

Part science, part art, executive coaching offers clients a broader perspective for professional and personal improvement.



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What can executive coaching do for you? Do you want to know firsthand what happens in a coaching session? Is coaching worth the time and money?

Twelve professional coaches who work with IESE's Executive Coaching Unit address these big questions in *The 7 Moments of Coaching*, a slim, easy-to-read volume co-edited by professor Alberto Ribera with Alan McFarlane and Nia Plamenova.

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Showing the key stages and moments of coaching, the book delves into issues such as resilience, empathy, motivation, leadership, difficult relationships, decision-making and fulfillment.

There are real stories of how coaches helped clients face up to their challenges, step by step. Along the way, the book also provides tools and tips to explain coaching concepts and to help with the daily grind.

What is executive coaching and how does it work?

The perception of executive coaching has shifted greatly in the past 10 years, backed by a growing body of research that credits executive coaching with improvements in executive performance, their sense of well-being, leadership and interpersonal skills. As the book puts it, "coaching is a way of thinking and learning based on genuine dialogue."

The 7 Moments of Coaching aims to show (not tell) how coaching works. It demonstrates the power of solution-based coaching, where the answers always come from the clients themselves. In their coaching conversations, they are allowed to explore and challenge their own beliefs and see how these color their perceptions of situations and/or themselves.

"In other words, coaching helps people get over mental and emotional interferences so they can make better decisions," the authors state.

The process also helps clients develop a positive attitude toward change and personal improvement.

Previously, coaching was sometimes seen as a fix for a specific problem. Nowadays, receiving executive coaching is taken as a sign of potential and high performance. It focuses on developing leadership competencies and facilitating change during key transition periods.

For example, coaching can help managers improve their assertiveness and deepen their accountability to employees, which improves leadership and helps retain talent in an organization.

Coaching can also help inculcate a sense of meaning and purpose in people and in organizations.

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The book explores numerous coaching tools — from the use of metaphors to reframing, mirroring and questioning techniques.

The goal of all of these tools is to "expand the mindset of the client and bring forth their values and strengths" in order to arrive at real solutions to relevant problems.

The seven moments (plus one)

The book identifies seven key moments within the process of coaching, each described in a separate chapter. There is no way to compare or equate two coaching processes, as they are different for every client. Yet some or all of these seven moments usually manifest themselves in one way or another in most coaching journeys.

All the chapters of the book describe real-life coaching processes handled by the professionals collaborating with IESE's Executive Coaching Unit.

The chapters also include summary boxes to highlight the most salient points of the stories and to explain important concepts for all professionals interested in personal development.

Moment 1: Get away from it all

The first chapter explains the need for removing oneself from the usual context in order to talk about a current situation with greater perspective and distance. It is illustrated with the stories of two managers stuck in very difficult work situations.

Moment 2: I have never talked about this to anyone before

The second chapter shows the importance and freedom that comes when talking to a coach with no hidden agendas or preconceived ideas, who offers a safe psychological space and support.

Moment 3: No one has ever told me that before

This third moment shows what happens when clients hear or realize something about themselves for the first time.

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The chapter tells the story of a consultant who became aware of some aspects of her personality that were interfering with her work. It also follows the coaching process that helped a recently appointed CEO to deal with the difficulties in leading her new team.

Moment 4: It's exactly the same, but I see it differently now

This chapter is about reframing — the ability to see something that once seemed threatening or unsatisfying through a new lens, by finding a way to view it as an opportunity.

One of the stories in this chapter follows a successful entrepreneur who seemed to have everything going for him and yet felt frustrated. Thanks to the coaching process, the root cause of his dissatisfaction emerged, and the process of alleviating it could begin.

Another real-life example revolves around the troubled relationship between a manager and her boss, which was improved by the subordinate's change in attitude.

Moment 5: Duh! It was staring me in the face all along

This moment occurs when clients open their eyes to possibilities that were hiding in plain sight all along. It is illustrated with the story of a sales director who needed to change the way he communicated with his team.

Moment 6: I am who I am and I can

This chapter talks about the growing confidence clients feel when they acknowledge and accept who they really are, and begin to make decisions and take actions aligned with their authentic selves.

The moment is shown in the story of a lawyer who didn't believe he was up to his prominent job title. Another story concerns a finance director who doubted his leadership abilities as he faced his first difficult situation in a large company.

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Moment 7: Aha!

This is coaching's top moment, when new, transformative ideas form, often unexpectedly, illuminating the way forward.

To illustrate the aha moment, a pair of stories explain how two clients gain insights — one into himself, and the other into his situation — and are able to widen their perspectives and change their behavior.

The Plus One moment: Thank you!

This chapter offers stories of clients' appreciation for their coaching breakthroughs and gives the reader a broader idea of what coaching does for both clients and coaches.

The 7 Moments of Coaching has received a strong endorsement by Carol Kauffman, founder of the Institute of Coaching and professor at Harvard Medical School. In the prologue, she writes: "I've learned more from this small book than I have from any other book in years."

The 7 Moments of Coaching: Stories of Inner Journeys is available here.

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