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The 5 Reasons Why Executive Coaching Programs Fail

And, What to do About it!

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Leadership defines the culture, direction, and success of every organization.
Great leadership doesn't just happen; it's built with intention.

Excellent leaders are no longer optional; they're a necessity. But senior leaders and executives face a number of challenges that impact their effectiveness. Many struggle with:

- Navigating complex organizational politics
- Maintaining relationships with peers who have competing priorities
- Balancing strategic priorities with daily operational demands
- Managing stakeholder expectations
- Imposter syndrome
- Decision fatigue
- Difficulty influencing at the highest levels

Additionally, leading through change, handling high-pressure situations, and sustaining personal resilience can become overwhelming.

> **A study published in the Harvard Business Review found that organizations that implement executive coaching programs experience a 22% increase in profitability.**

What Is Executive Coaching Really About?

Executive coaching provides a structured and supportive environment to help leaders gain clarity, enhance their leadership presence, and develop the skills necessary to drive meaningful impact. The impact is compelling: higher employee engagement, stronger leadership pipelines, and improved business outcomes.

However, not all coaching programs are created equal. Many organizations inadvertently sabotage their coaching initiatives, diminishing their effectiveness and failing to realize their full potential.

AT EVERY LEVEL

Challenges

Outcomes

Executives

- Derailing behavioral tendencies
- Underestimation of business impact
- Self-doubt and overwhelm

- Credibility and commitment
- Purpose driven and visionary
- Confidence and clarity

Senior Leaders

- Competing priorities
- Operating at the wrong level
- Unclear individual and team purpose
- Churn and lack of alignment

- Connected and trustworthy
- Ability to prioritize and execute
- Enterprise focused mentality
- Clarity and efficient decision making

Managers

- Technically sound, unprepared to lead
- Low self-awareness
- Lack of understanding of impact
- Tolerance for poor performance

- Confident and ready
- Self aware
- Intentional and on purpose
- Sets high expectations

Individuals

- Communication breakdowns
- Personality differences
- Distructive conflict

- Improved Communication
- Ability to adapt to others
- Innovative and creative dialogue

Mistake #1: Not Connected to Business Outcomes

One of the most significant errors is treating executive coaching as a standalone activity, disconnected from the organization's strategic goals. Without a clear link to business outcomes, coaching can feel aimless and fail to gain traction within the organization.

OUR APPROACH: Aligning with Business Priorities

We start with the business in mind. Every engagement begins with an in-depth understanding of your organizational goals, leadership challenges, and desired outcomes. This ensures that coaching directly supports business priorities, whether that's driving innovation, improving collaboration, or enhancing customer satisfaction. We understand what leaders need at different levels and tailor the coaching approach to those specific needs.

ASSESSMENTS

LEADER
OBSERVATION

COACHING

MANAGER
CALIBRATION

LEADERSHIP
TOOLKITS

HABIT TRACKING

BEHAVIORAL
MEASUREMENT

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Mistake #2: Failing to Extend Beyond the Coaching Session

Many coaching programs stop at one-on-one conversations, leaving leaders unsupported in translating insights into action. This narrow focus limits the broader impact of coaching.

OUR APPROACH: Turning Insight into Action

We leverage our A.C.E. (Aligned, Confident, Emotionally Intelligent) coaching system that goes far beyond conversations to include:

- Assessments to create a baseline for development
- Integration with key stakeholders for alignment
- Observation to provide real-world context
- Manager calibration to ensure support
- Habit tracking and measurement to reinforce change

This multi-faceted approach ensures leaders make meaningful and sustainable progress.

	DO	DON'T
Personal Fit	• Seek a coach that you can trust. • Ask yourself if the coach can help you achieve your professional goals. • Determine if the coach will understand AND challenge you. • Identify if the coach has a track record of success.	• Make a decision based on gut feel alone. • Make a decision based only on whether you "like" or feel a "good vibe" with the coach.
Experience and Background	• Find a coach with coaching expertise relative to your need (e.g., executive coaching, leadership coaching, business coaching, life coaching, etc.). • Assess the coach's level of thought leadership. • Ensure your coach has the appropriate coaching credentials or equivalent expertise.	• Don't make a decision based on similarity of background only. • Ignore differences because those differences may help you see your situation from a new perspective and push you in the coaching journey.
Coach Approach	• Understand how the coaching process works. • Get clear on the assessments or instruments the coach will use to support the process. • Ensure the coach can articulate how the coaching process will be measured (ROI).	• Ignore the time commitment needed to make real change.

Mistake #3: Selection Based on Popularity

Choosing a coach because they're well-liked or well-known—instead of aligning with specific needs—can undermine the effectiveness of the program. A coach may have an impressive reputation, but selecting a coach based purely on style and gut instinct alone can lead to missed opportunities for growth and development.

OUR APPROACH: Choosing Effective Coaches

We employ a "coach fit" selection process based on key criteria, including experience, expertise, and alignment with organizational culture. This approach ensures each leader is matched with the right coach for maximum impact. With a team of 20+ coaches, we have the expertise to meet a wide range of coaching needs.

Mistake #4: Neglecting Perceptions

Leaders face two key challenges in executive coaching:

1. Making Behavioral Changes: Most leaders in coaching are already highly successful and seeking to elevate their impact. Fortunately, most of those leaders can walk out of a coaching session and make changes fairly quickly.

2. Changing Others' Perceptions (The Bigger Challenge): Even when leaders make positive changes, existing perceptions—shaped by history, first impressions, and past experiences—can be slow to shift. Additionally, there's often a delay between when a leader changes and when others recognize or believe that change is real and lasting.

Our research, based on tracking leadership behavioral change through Coachmetrix technology, shows that it takes an average of five months for others to acknowledge a leader's transformation. And that's for a leader who is consistently working on change and reinforcing it through pulse feedback surveys.

The reality? If a leader changes their behavior but doesn't shift others' perceptions, the change doesn't fully take hold.

Perceptions
Behaviors
Intentions
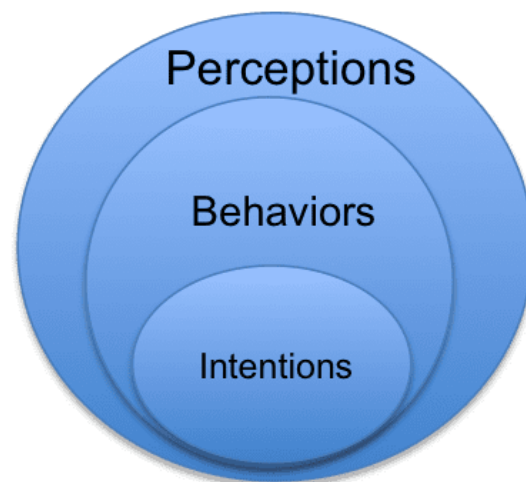
OUR APPROACH: Change Perceptions, not just behaviors

Elite athletes credit their success to the teams surrounding them—coaches, teammates, and support staff. We apply the same principle to leadership development.

That's why we involve stakeholders, whom we call "supporters," in our coaching programs. Supporters are individuals affected by the leader's behavior who provide ongoing feedback and "feed-forward" throughout the leadership development process. This engagement offers the leader actionable insights while simultaneously shifting the supporters' perceptions—a challenge often more difficult than changing behavior itself.
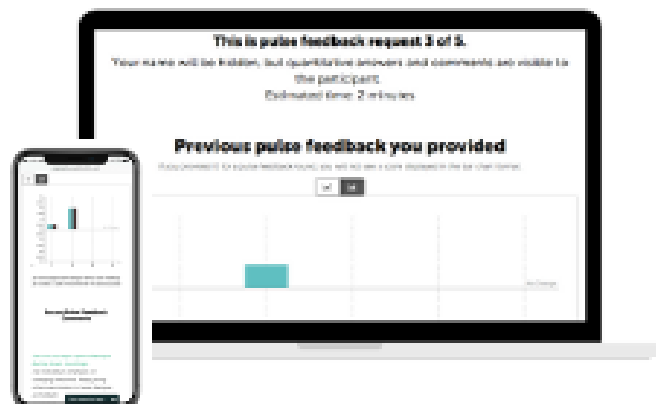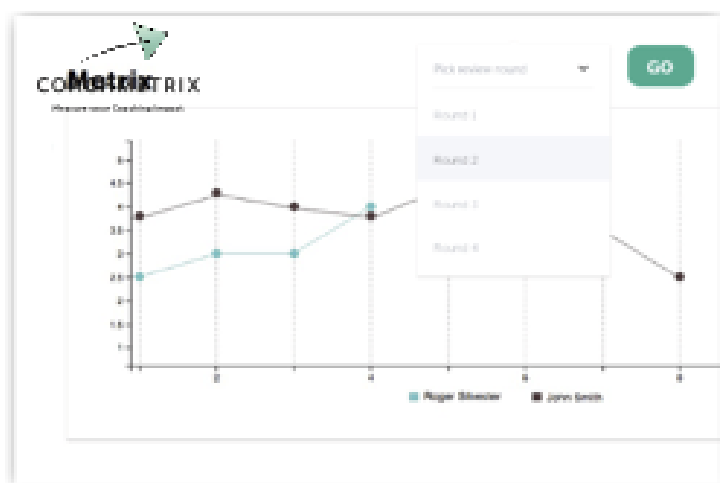
Mistake #5: Lack of Behavioral Measurement

Executives pay for results, not coaching. But the challenge is that most organizations have no way of knowing whether their coaching programs are driving real change. They often rely on anecdotal and self assessment data. This lack of measurement makes it difficult to justify the coaching investment.

OUR APPROACH: Measure Behavioral Change & ROI

Measuring change in leadership development is our specialty at 5.12 Solutions—an area that sets us apart from other executive coaching firms. We believe coaches and executive coaching sponsors should clearly understand their return on investment (ROI).

That's why we created Coachmetrix, our cloud-based executive coaching platform. Coachmetrix provides leaders with ongoing behavioral change data from those impacted by their leadership, ensuring transparency and accountability.

In fact, we are so confident in our coaching system that many of our engagements are performance-based, meaning our fees are directly tied to measurable behavioral outcomes. We also apply this methodology to our Executive Team Acceleration Program to measure collective team behaviors.

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Take the Next Step

At 5.12 Solutions, we don't just coach leaders — we leverage our A.C.E (Aligned, Confident, Emotionally Intelligent) Coaching System to help growth minded leaders and executive teams measurably improve human performance to enable better business results.

Contact us today at
www.512solutions.com

to schedule a consultation and discover how we can help your leaders and your organization thrive.