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## The art of coaching

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### **Employers say mentors can help retain workers**

When Bob Vidal of Jato Communications doesn't do his homework, his coach lets him know it.

"I've coached a lot of people in my day," says Vidal, Jato's senior vice president of human resources. "But for the first time, the shoe's on the other foot--now I'm on the receiving end of weekly coaching."

So are nine other fellow Jato execs. Delta Road, a Denver-based career and executive coaching company, is into the ninth week of a 10-week executive coaching process at the business-to-business Internet solutions company -- a strategy the company adopted in direct response to a high-tech, industry-wide employee retention problem, says Vidal.

"It's not uncommon to see a 35 percent-a-year retention turnover in our business," says Vidal. "And the price we pay is staggering. One study calculates the .cost of employee turnover at three times that of an individual's salary."

### **What is coaching?**

Lois Todd is Delta Road's vice president of coach relations and oversees the company's 300-plus consortium of executive coaches. Todd works with companies to structure Delta Road's customized coaching process. "Executive coaches elevate the job game," says Todd. "They identify key areas of employee and company concerns and strengths."

Counseling, mentoring, serving as a much-needed sounding board and offering brainstorming and consultation, an executive or career coach is sometimes defined by what it's not.

"Coaching does a lot of things," says Todd. "But coaching is not therapy, it's not about giving advice. Coaching improves communication and creates a vision for everyone concerned on issues like work-life balance, productivity and company as well as individual goals," she says. "It's a one-on-one process, an individualized program that provides specific tools and techniques to effectively manage personal and organizational challenges. It's all about company and employee strengthening and growth."

### **What it takes**

Executive coaching credentials are as varied as the coaches themselves. To date, no established criteria exist. "There are no Licensing requirements yet," says Will Craig, Denver Coach Federation president. "However, there are organizations like the

International Coaching Federation. We expect there will be licensing 10 years from now."

Most career coaches come from several years in corporate or human development careers. Often, they bring an array of academic and professional credentials.

Mary Ann Looby, principal behind People Dynamics Consulting, says she brings a lifetime career of human resource work to her clients; Craig holds a master's degree in human development and worked in marketing for 20 years. And Angelique Matney of Career Navigations, who specializes in career coaching for legal professionals, holds M.B.A. and J.D. degrees.

If there's a common thread running through executive coaches' criteria, it's a results-oriented mission. Coaches across most all disciplines will talk about how they develop a product -- and the product is the employee.

"Executive coaching creates and executes the highest performance standards within a company," says Todd. "Simply put, an executive-coach approach solves business problems within a company's work team -- and adds immediate and measurable value to a company."

Even if that means reinventing the boss. Noah Reaven, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist who has spent the last six months intervening in a Denver-based retail company's management crisis. In weekly, one-hour sessions, Reaven coached his client's management team into identifying then brainstorming about what exactly was at the heart of the company's management problems.

After identifying the issues, they worked as a team to ease into solutions. "What I've done is facilitate management through the process of discovering who does what job best," says Reaven. "In this case, we intervened, as a group, in the way the company operated. As a group, which included the owner of the company, we reinvented the owner's job description. We discovered that the former comptroller (for this company), as it turns out, is best suited as the company's general manager.

"Corporate coaching is a lot about retention," says Reaven. "That's the big issue these days. It's about getting key management people into places where they feel invigorated, challenged and rewarded for their work."

### **How coaching pays**

Vidal admits that Jato's keeping one eye on how the company's executive-coaching investment pays off. "Working with Delta Road's coaches means that the return of investment is obviously how well I retain productive employees," he says. "That might seem a bit Machiavellian, but if I've got a sales person with \$2 million in sales for the past five years -- and I add three years of employment by that person with our company -- that's \$6 million in revenue to the company.

"I've received direct reports about some of the immediate and positive effects of our coaching program," says Vidal. "The people in the process all say that they are in better touch with how they think and feel about things. And it's helped them define 'success' and what that means to them individually and within the company.

"We'll never get employee turnover down to 0 percent," says Vidal. "But coaching is definitely one more tool assisting us in our retention efforts. Coaching hones our managers and talented people into leaders. It tells employees that we're worried about their future."

For more information, contact Susan Hyatt at (303) 512-0808.

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