



Switch & Shift
A League of Extraordinary Thinkers

Executive Coaching: How to Preserve and Promote Women in Leadership



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Ask any woman who has succeeded at the highest levels of leadership, and she'll tell you: It wasn't easy. Women don't always tell their stories of challenge and struggle, because it doesn't serve their image or their influence to do so. But behind closed doors, in the privacy of a coaching session, they reveal just how many hurdles they had to overcome. As an executive coach, I have the privilege of coaching executive women past obstacles so they can focus on their leadership and impact instead. Of all the strategies, perspectives, behaviors, actions and mindsets I've used over the years to strengthen women in leadership, there's one that has the biggest impact on their success: the executive coaching itself.

Executive Coaching

Because the dilemmas faced by women leaders are not always safe topics for conversation, the confidentiality of private coaching and its deeply personal, entirely individualized nature make it an ideal environment for working through challenges that inevitably accompany leadership.

More than enough evidence suggests [coaching is an invaluable tool](#) to increase the presence of women at the corporate executive level. One [McKinsey report](#) found that the opportunity to work with an external coach was identified as "by far the most valuable component" of the leadership programs they studied. In our own research, we found that coaching for executive women has resulted directly in promotions. In one study, over 85 percent of the female senior-level leaders were promoted within the first 6 months of beginning their coaching, and almost all advanced within a year.

Why? Because in their coaching sessions, women find pressures and anxieties melt away, and their motivation and momentum return.

Benefits for Businesses

For companies that want to employ women and promote their advancement, coaching is an approach that creates a win-win. Businesses get better leaders, and leaders get better results.

While most leaders are open-minded, creative and ambitious, their vision and approach to success can be clouded by the busy world they live in. Executive coaching allows one to pinpoint the places in one's career that could use a boost, such as: networking, a more balanced life, mentorship, sponsorship, executive presences, performance, gaining the right kind of recognition, advancement, feedback or awareness of potential bias. Strengthening these areas can give the advantageous edge needed to take a career to the next level.

Benefits for Women

Executive coaching allows those being coached to understand the information and strategies that make up these advantages; which leads to salary improvement, recognition of performance and an overall better life.



For example, women have been shown to be more self-critical than men, and as a result, [feedback can hit hard](#). They may have developed a thick skin in years in business, and perhaps no longer feel the sting that can accompany feedback, but many women struggle with it, both the criticism and the praise. However, experience with feedback, especially large-scale, multilayer feedback, is greatly enhanced by working with a coach. Coaches can assist in: discerning the most salient feedback, making sense of the feedback, determining the most effective action steps, successfully implementing the follow-up process, improving effectiveness and communicating the positive changes that have been made.

Why Coaching Works

Women live very complex lives with complications that are only compounded when they are talented, committed, executive women as well. I have observed the same pattern repeatedly, highly successful on one hand, exhausted and disheartened on the other. Executive coaching's benefit is to create a place to work that out. One-on-one, having all the time needed to talk about goals and aspirations, but also chip away at the obstacles and attend to the emotional side of being a woman in leadership.

The impact is dramatic as women find their confidence, take ownership of their careers, and break through to higher levels of leadership. They are happier, more fulfilled, and find peace.

I want every woman to have that experience. Perhaps then, in the near future we can come closer to [breaking the bias and inequality women in leadership face](#).

PUBLISHED ON SEPTEMBER 7, 2016

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