

# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR POTENTIAL EXECUTIVE /LEADERSHIP COACH



Regrettably, I am in a profession with minimal barriers to entry; just about anyone, within reason, can claim to do what I do. Every week, I meet another person who is billing themselves as a business coach or executive coach and charging a considerable amount of money for something they have no business doing in the first place. More often than not, it is someone who has been downsized from an existing position or exiting a failed business endeavor, an individual who has hit a career brick-wall themselves, an academic with free time on his/her hands, an independent consultant looking to supplement their income, or a psychotherapist who has figured out they can charge more money with a different title. I sometimes shudder at the bad advice which is regularly disseminated to executives and business owners by well-intentioned but under-skilled or poorly-trained executive coaches. Here are a few questions I recommend you ask before working with someone in this capacity:

▶ What led them to pursue the executive coaching path?

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▶ How long have they been serving in a coaching capacity? How many clients do they have? What have been some tangible business results they have achieved with their clients? Always ask for and check references.

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▶ Have they run a business themselves, or at least had significant P&L responsibility within a larger entity? How well did they perform in this role? Ask for specifics.

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▶ What is their level of formal business training/education?

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- ▶ What business books/periodicals/publications are they reading on a regular basis?  
What are some recent books/articles that resonated with them?

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- ▶ What formal training have they received to qualify them as an Executive Coach? How are they maintaining and sharpening their executive coaching skills on a regular basis?

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- ▶ Are they affiliated with a larger entity that offers support and guidance, or are they simply a solo practitioner?

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- ▶ What is their approach to business/executive coaching? How did they form this approach?

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- ▶ What are their coaching areas of expertise? When do they refer out to other professionals?

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▶ Will they leverage their coaching relationship with you to create other business consulting opportunities with your company?

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▶ What else do they do professionally besides coaching? What percentage of their business is spent on non-coaching activities?

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▶ How successful is their coaching practice in terms of revenue growth and profitability? What is their long-term plan for their coaching business?

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▶ How long does their average client typically work with them? Why does the relationship usually end?

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▶ Do they use a coach and/or participate in a peer group? If not, why not?

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Coaching relationships can become very personal and intimate as you reveal yourself to another person and begin to trust their confidence. In some cases, especially with more vulnerable leaders, the advice and counsel you receive becomes secondary to the growing professional and personal bond. Because of this, it becomes extremely hard to exit the relationship, even if it isn't serving you well. I've seen many executives stick with a coach out of loyalty, long after the relationship has served its original purpose.

I advise you to be careful about whom you entrust with your leadership development and business future. Just because someone says they can do something doesn't mean they should be the one to do it.

Don't forget to ask for client references.

*Buyer beware!*

