



Sherpa Strength: The Newsletter of Executive Coaching

February 2010

Be Careful What You Call It

Process-Driven Executive Coaching

By Karl Corbett, Managing Partner, Sherpa Coaching

For years, most executive coaches have supported the idea of a “recognized and standard process for coaching, similar to the accounting or financial planning professions.” In our 2010 Coaching Survey, we asked executive coaches whether they follow a published process. Seemed like a fairly straightforward question. The results turned out to be a surprise.

- 40 percent of executive coaches say they do not follow a process at all. They ‘develop a unique approach from one client to the next’.
- An additional 40 percent have ‘developed their own process for coaching’.
- Only 20 percent follow a published process that guides their coaching engagements.

The fact that so few coaches use a published process is surprising. There is far more to this than the numbers reveal. Coaches answered a survey question, but they also wrote at length in the comments section of the survey.

There are several schools of thought, and three types of coaching process.

1. There’s the ‘way too vague’ process, from coaches who claim use of a process, but never document it beyond a few paragraphs.
2. There’s the ‘memorize this’ approach. Some coaching schools teach an extremely proscriptive process. For every conversation, there’s a scripted answer.
3. Somewhere in the middle is the Sherpa process: a road map that allows hundreds of customized journeys and a toolbox that can be used in a thousand different ways.

Some coaches fight the idea that a process can guide their work. In fact, they might be using a process, even as they reject the notion that a process might be helpful. As one coach told us: *“I passionately disagree w/ the belief that there is a single “process” one should follow with every client. While 50-60% of my own approach might be called a process (repeatable steps, done consistently each time) the balance is specific to each client, based on their agenda versus the coach’s prescription.”*

That sounds like the middle ground: a set of repeatable steps, done consistently, and supported by a toolbox of assessments, assignments, exercises and learning opportunities.

The Sherpa team has promoted process-driven executive coaching for a long time now. Based on this new information, we are going to be careful with the word ‘process’. There are bad coaches out there, who can leave a bad taste about coaching in general. Apparently, there are bad processes out there which do the same.

Karl Corbett is Managing Partner at Sherpa Coaching in Cincinnati, Ohio USA. He conducts the annual Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey and coordinates the Sherpa author with their university partners. Karl can be reached at (513) 232-0002 or at kc@sherpacoaching.com.