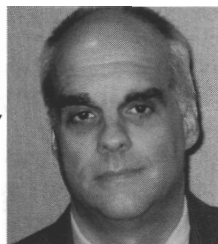


# Professional Coaching Improves Effectiveness on Campus

With 60-80% of companies using executive coaches to help gain a competitive edge, campuses are now looking at coaching as another service to help leaders maximize their potential, enjoy a higher quality of life and increase loyalty.

In 2004, **Sam Hester** ran a three-month pilot study to measure the effects of coaching at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, where he is work/life coordinator. He shared results at the Alliance for Work-Life Progress conference in Austin in March. His office has offered executive coaching services since 2004.



Sam Hester

## What is coaching?

Recognizing that interpersonal skills are often more important than cognitive IQ in today's workplace, coaching concentrates on the "who" instead of the "what." Hester said coaching provides a process for challenging and supporting people to continually explore new ideas and expand their capacity for results. They acquire and increase skills and competencies in areas such as leadership, communication, conflict and stress management, and interpersonal relationships.

Coaching is different from therapy. While therapy addresses concerns from the past to the present, coaching concerns those from the present to the future. Therapy assumes there's current difficulty in functioning, while coaching does not. Participants in coaching can be either those identified for performance issues or those eager to optimize their skills and increase their value.

Hester used Thomas J. Leonard's definition of coaching:

*A professional coach is your partner in achieving business and personal goals. Your champion during a turnaround. Your trainer in communication and life skills. Your sounding board in making life choices. Your unconditional support when you take a hit. Your mentor in personal development. Your co-designer in creating an extra project. Your beacon during stormy times. Your wake-up call when you can't hear your own alarm.*

Since coaches are concerned with the individual and not the organization, they need not be in the same profession. Hester called the skills that coaches focus on "transferable skills"—basic interpersonal skills that cross all disciplines.

## The game plan

A study recently published by the International Personnel Management Association revealed that work-force training increased productivity by 22.4% while training combined with coaching resulted in an overall productivity gain of 88%. Hester set out to see if coaching got the same results in academia.

To get started, Hester extended an invitation in an e-newsletter, and six enthusiastic and willing individuals joined the Executive Coaching Pilot Program.

Five of the six were women, which Hester explained

by saying, "Women still experience a glass ceiling as they aspire to senior leadership positions in both academia and the business world—probably even more in academia. In that context, women might be more 'in need of coaching' to obtain those necessary leadership skills and strategies to better the odds of promotion."

Their first meeting included completing an open-ended questionnaire and a survey measuring their job expectations, stressors, communication skills and leadership abilities. Only a third reported being content with their leadership skills and ability to handle stress. Only 50% were satisfied with their productivity and felt confident to manage conflict at work.

Over the next three months, participants met with a coach at least weekly, either by phone or in person. Sometimes they had a specific topic, while at other times the conversation would "flow and shift," allowing for spontaneous growth opportunities. Between meetings, they got e-mail support. All aspects were confidential.

## Final score

After three months of coaching, Hester re-administered the initial survey to measure the change. Results showed executive coaching had an extremely positive impact on the participants.

- 100% reported satisfaction with their task management skills—**up 83%**
- 83% said they were satisfied with their leadership skills—**up 50%**
- 100% were confident in their ability to manage conflict at work—**up 50%**
- 83% reported satisfaction with their productivity levels—**up 33%**
- 100% said they were happy with their own personal development process at the university—**up 83%**
- 66% said they handled their personal stress effectively—**up 33%**
- 83% said they were satisfied with their current work-life balance—**up 66%**

Hester was most surprised at people's stress levels. American businesses lose an estimated \$300-400 billion a year in stress-related productivity, more than the net profits of all Fortune 500 companies combined. He noted that academia is far from stress-free, and cutting stress can reduce absenteeism and health care costs. "If people can learn some very simple things, they can eliminate much of their stress, which allows them to be more effective."

Coaching is just another natural service schools can offer to remain competitive employers, he said. "For the university to become a workplace of choice—especially in these lean fiscal times—our workforce must continue to become more productive while also having reasonable and attainable performance measures, and coaching is among the most effective tools we can offer." ■

—DRB

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**Coaching focuses on 'transferable skills,' basic interpersonal skills that cross all disciplines.**