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Coaching Teams . Changing Cultures

How Team Coaching Can Help Your Executive Team Lead As One By – Jenn Lofgren

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As an executive coach, I have worked with hundreds of individual senior leaders over the last several years. Coaching executive teams can be quite similar to individual coaching in a lot of ways – especially if you view your team as a singular leading entity.

Teams are made up of individuals and yet a team's impact is greater than the sum of the individual's contributions. Team members have an interdependent relationship with one another to achieve common goals, tasks and a company vision. Team coaching helps the team see this interdependence and the strengths, obstacles and potential of the team when it works in harmony to find its own answers. In essence, team coaching involves, at its core, systems thinking.

Often senior leadership teams are composed of leaders who head their own departments. An executive team meeting may then feel like a battleground of sorts, where each leader's goal is to represent and fight for their direct and indirect reports – their own team. However, as business author Patrick Lencioni has written in his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, for the organization to succeed, the leadership team has to be your number one team. The development process of team coaching enhances a leadership team's overall systems thinking beyond their immediate team.

Team Coaching Vs. Team Building

Some might think that team coaching is the same as team building. While team building is important, team coaching is about digging into the tough stuff to create tangible alignment and cohesive teams. Team coaching includes a blend of coaching, teaching, facilitation, mediation and positive psychology. It helps your leadership team lead as a consistent principal of the organization.

Think of your relationship with the leadership team as if it were a marriage. Team building is like going on fun dates together. It's important to have fun and regular alone time as a couple, but it isn't enough if the couple focuses



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only on having fun and avoids having conversations about their goals, their future and where they might fail to find alignment. Team coaching is where you step into the “work” part of the marriage. But if a couple only ever does the hard work and never has any time set aside for activities together, they can grow tired of always doing “hard work” and this too can erode the relationship. We need time to both be in the relationship and work on the relationship.

Individual Executive Coaching Vs. Team Coaching

Executive coaching is important to help individuals work on their mindset and development as a singular leader. Team coaching works with the whole “team” at once — not the individuals — to develop as one cohesive system. We coach the system itself and the relationship of the team. Both are important aspects to bring a leadership team to peak effectiveness.

Team coaching looks at the interactions between individuals in a way that can't happen in one-to-one coaching. When working with one leader, we can dig in deeply on helping them develop their personal skills and leadership effectiveness. But, when one person changes, the whole system must change and adapt. Sometimes this change is difficult, even if it is desired by the rest of the team or organization. We can do great work with one individual who can have an unintended positive or negative impact on the relationships within the team or the whole organization as a result. No one is an island. When one person changes their behaviors, they change the norms of the relationships. Others must adapt to the new way of being in that relationship and working with that person.

Executive coaching helps a leader become more effective in their role. Team coaching helps each role become more effective within the team. However, a team member can move between roles and the system still needs to be effective. Teams rely on roles to complete their unique functions and tasks. Empowered team members share the load and lean on the team for solutions rather than have all the answers. Team coaching ensures the group has a healthy ability to generate those solutions and execute on them.

Just like executive coaching, there are elements within team coaching that help a team be effective, such as relationship goals, team assessments, team leadership and 360 assessments, identifying team purpose, creating a vision for the team and understanding what the team is collectively yearning for.



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Team coaching helps teams work together with deeper trust so they can engage in healthy conflict and debate and get behind the group decisions, even if they would not make those decisions themselves. They find greater organizational clarity and the ability to communicate consistently with others in the organization as a whole. While business workflow and decisions may remain difficult, teams develop a process to work through conflict, rather than getting stuck in it.

Who Needs Team Coaching

Team coaching can help teams work through decisions where there are no right answers. The process can help strengthen trust with one another and increase alignment and accountability. It can be valuable to any executive team, but teams that are experiencing some issues can benefit the most. These could be teams wanting to level up their collective leadership and become a more aligned, less siloed leadership team. They could also be leading the organization through change or currently experiencing persistent conflict or challenges with one another or experiencing a sense of feeling stuck. There may be teams struggling with any level of team dysfunction from mild to toxic, or on the contrary, teams that don't engage in conflict and are stuck in false harmony, meaning everyone is nice but no one is candid with one another.

Team coaching isn't a one-and-done experience, but a developmental process just like executive coaching. The team must commit to regularly working together on their relationship and the system as a team and maintain the behaviors they've developed through the process.