

How COVID-19 changed executive coaching; a new rhythm in a post-coronavirus world

Executive coach and business leader Daniel Beutler looks at how the rhythm of coaching has changed over the pandemic and helped to build closer relationships.

Temps de lecture : minute

28 October 2020

I have journeyed on a steep learning curve over recent months and, despite some caveats, have come to a positive overall conclusion as to how executive coaching has changed over the pandemic. With coaching topics changing from growth to survival, from staying all positive to dealing with anxiety, coaching has been needed more than ever before.

The enforced physical distance combined with the pressure of responding to such uncertain times has helped many executives see things clearer: a business model that needed reshaping; that underperformer that you can't keep anymore; or dispensing with a membership that nobody really used to help achieve a leaner cost structure. These are many decisions that we wouldn't normally want to make in a world where we could avoid it.

A new rhythm

Interestingly, these factors have changed the rhythm of executive coaching. With an increased urge to make big calls and changes faster

and more frequently, there has been a desire from executives to speak more often (up to every week, but rather one hour than two), which was flexibly doable once agreed that Zoom and other web conference packages are an alternative.

What I felt as a result was that, ironically, coach and coachee have become closer in coaching sessions. Once you lose the virtual background you get a previously unseen glance into each other's personal lives; I meet the partner, the son, the daughter, the delivery guy, you make a bad joke about your room not being spotless, and it changes the whole dynamic. It hasn't made the process any less professional but has added a personal touch and generated a sincere level of trust and care; a feeling of being in it together which has, in turn, created the perfect basis for support.

As a coach, it has meant a lot to me too, not to bury our heads in the sand during the storm but to overcome these volatile and uncertain times together. Seeing my coachees continue and fight to come out stronger on the other side has given me extra energy to help support them further, creating an upward spiral.

A flexible approach

So, where does this leave executive coaching in a post COVID-19 world? I strongly believe that it will be needed more than ever with exposed executive positions likely to become even lonelier in the future. And I will proactively offer remote sessions to allow for more recurring and flexible sessions to adapt to this quickly changing context.

For new coachees, I would continue to suggest at least one session at the outset in person to get a better feeling for each other, to build trust more easily and to get a chance to observe the office, and interaction with teams and colleagues. But after that, continuing remotely should be fine,

and writing that makes me realise, once again, how much COVID-19 has advanced some of our thinking.

More time to make a difference

Before coronavirus, I took around 25 flights a year and, as I coach across Europe and North America, two hours of coaching often meant I had to take one and half days out of my agenda. In 2020 I won't be flying, and I doubt that travel will go back to pre-pandemic levels. That means I have more time on my hands in support of social, cultural and environmental causes – areas that are dear to my heart. One initiative I've begun – which is extremely rewarding – is offering pro-bono coaching to women in leadership in businesses that offer social, cultural or environmental benefits.

These are sectors that often wouldn't be able to pay for a coach but will have a significant impact on how we'll live in the future and we need more women taking up leadership positions. Working with these budget constrained businesses keeps me grounded, helps me to learn more about coaching but is also a chance to give something back.

Daniel is an executive business coach, board advisor and speaker. After a career as a corporate CEO with Deutsche Bahn, he continued his career in the startup world to as COO of Captain Train. After the acquisition by Trainline, which he led in a transformational change process, he became President of Trainline Intl and a leader to create one of the biggest European tech hits and IPOs of recent years.

Today, he uses his experience to focus on coaching and advising leaders from both worlds, to accompany them to achieve their goals.

