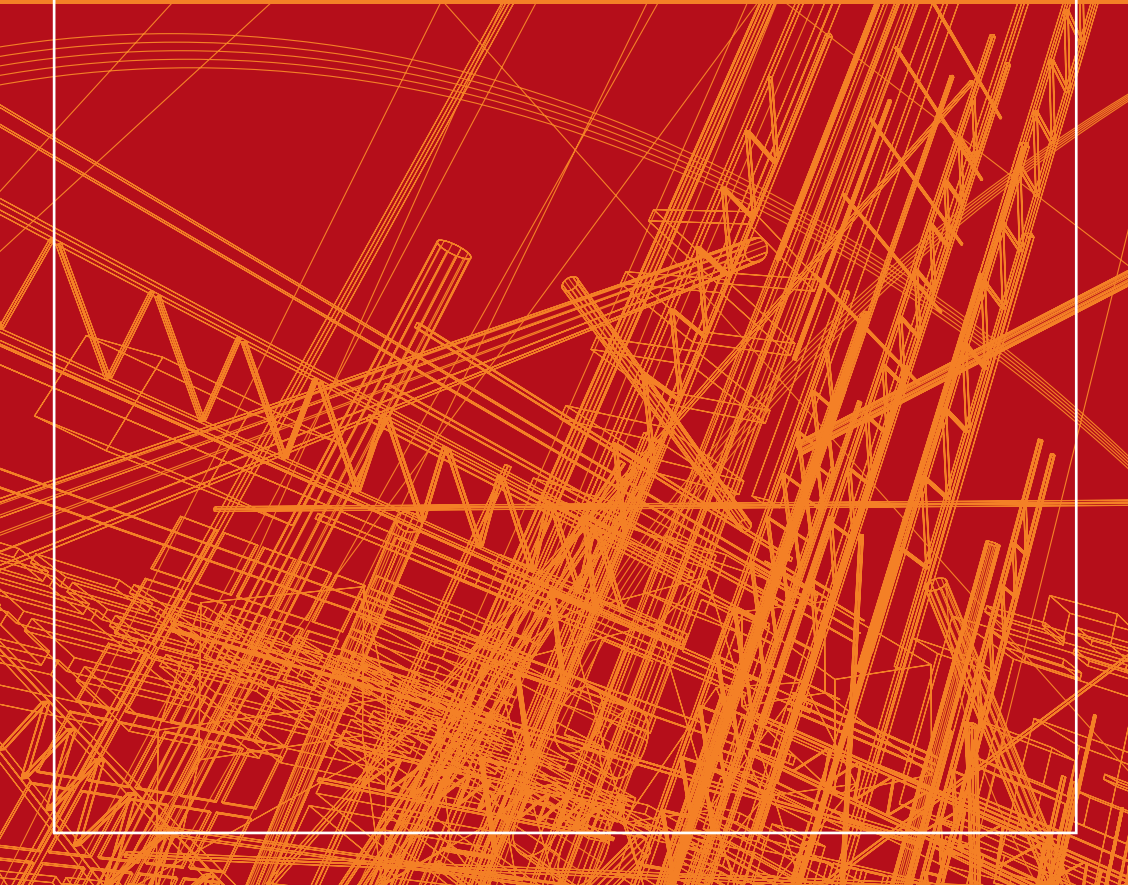


Lewis R. Stern

EXECUTIVE COACHING

Building and Managing
Your Professional Practice



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Professional Practice

LEWIS R. STERN



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Preface

This book is the product of 30 exciting years of professional learning. In those 30 years, I have been privileged to work with thousands of leaders and experts in coaching and consulting around the world. The book is also informed by my recent work in several capacities including: cofounder and chairman of the executive coaching forum; co-founder and board member of the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching; founder, director, and faculty member of the Graduate Certificate Program in Executive Coaching at the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology; and chairman of the Global Convention on Coaching's Working Group on Guidelines for Coach Training. The book is a practical, how-to guide for people from diverse backgrounds who are interested in exploring, building, expanding, or better managing their professional practice in executive coaching. I believe this information will be valuable to management consultants, organization development specialists, human resources professionals, and coaches with other specialties. *External* consultants working from outside the client's organization, either independently or as part of a consulting firm or group, will find this book a useful guide. *Internal* consultants, or employees in the organization where their coaching clients work, will discover practical approaches and resources to build and manage their coaching practices from within their organizations.

My motivation for writing this book came from several sources. It has been frustrating to see many people call themselves executive

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coaches when they do not have the knowledge or expertise to serve their clients well. They have lowered the standards of quality as perceived by coaching clients and the public. I have had the privilege of working with professional executive coaches from varied backgrounds; many of them masters of the art as well as experts in the evidence-based nature of coaching leaders and would-be leaders around the world. I learn from them every day as they establish the highest of standards on which the evolving discipline of executive coaching is built.

There are many talented people in executive coaching who believe in setting rigid entry standards into the field. They maintain that the only people who can do executive coaching are professionals just like them. I do not believe that every executive coach needs to have a master's or doctorate degree in a specific field, 20 years of experience working in different industries, or a senior executive background. I do believe, however, that a base of knowledge, ability, skills, and attributes is required for anyone to do professional executive coaching as it is defined in this book. I also believe that not every executive coach has to be able to handle every possible coaching situation. Smart people with the right attributes and abilities can learn to be good coaches. This book helps you to assess whether you have these attributes and abilities and what you need to learn or compensate for to be a successful executive coach.

My final motivation for writing this book came from the graduate students and coaches I teach and supervise. Each student arrives with a passion for the field coupled with a lack of confidence about coaching. In their two years of extensive study, these students not only learn theory, principles, and practices—they also gain awareness about themselves and discover how to use their strengths and focus their practice accordingly. But each student also craves practical guidance for building and managing a coaching practice. That is the purpose of this book.

As I wrote this book, I often found myself trying to decide if I should take a stance on a topic I feel strongly about even though others in the field disagree with me. I decided to express my beliefs and opinions without apologizing or feeling obligated to represent

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other views. Read this book as one professional's perspective and recommended approaches to executive coaching. I also encourage you to consider differing perspectives and recommendations from other experts in the field.

This book is about what I and others have found to work best when building and managing a professional executive coaching practice. Chapter 1 starts by helping you decide if executive coaching is the right match for you. It offers some shared definitions of the field before getting into the nitty-gritty of what an executive coach actually does. I compare executive coaching to other forms of coaching and to counseling and psychotherapy, contrasting the competencies all coaches need with the specific competencies of executive coaches. Since the core of the definition of executive coaching I use is the double focus on leadership development and accomplishing organizational results, I review common goals for each of these objectives. Chapter 1 also provides checklists of what to do before, during, and after coaching; how to match a leader with the right coach; the role of the human resources professional in executive coaching; what actually takes place in executive coaching sessions; an overview of how to market your coaching services; and some suggestions on how to use this book to start or expand your professional practice as an executive coach.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed self-assessment and 360-degree survey to help you identify your strengths and opportunities for development as an executive coach. It includes a template for your professional development plan.

Chapter 3 gives you a step-by-step guide to creating your value proposition as an executive coach and developing and marketing your practice. This plan is based on not only your business goals, but also your personal and career goals. The marketing plan helps you define your target market and build a plan to penetrate it through networking and a consultative selling approach. Guidelines are provided for an array of marketing approaches including market research, marketing materials, e-mail, the Web, targeted mailings, presentations, publishing, advertising, and partnerships and referral sources.

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Chapter 4 is a guide to assembling and managing the building blocks of your practice: a coaching network, toolbox, office infrastructure, coaching project management system, professional and peer supervision, research and publication, and community service. The guide is detailed with specific options, suggestions, and examples of coaching tools, office space, data and file management, technology, project scoping, conducting chemistry checks with potential clients, contracting, assessments, and developing and managing a coaching project plan.

Chapter 5 helps you transition from other professional disciplines or coaching specialties: mental health, business management, organization development and management consulting, personal/life coaching, and internal human resources roles. Key strengths from each field are identified as well as potential barriers, and strategies to make the transition from each specialty into executive coaching are discussed.

Chapter 6 puts it all together and helps you develop a detailed plan for your professional executive coaching practice.

The Appendix is an extensive listing of resources available to executive coaches. It includes articles and books, journals, organizations, web sites, assessments, and tools. These resources are based on my personal experience and the recommendations from over 40 leaders in the field throughout the United States and the world.

As I began to write this book, I intended for it to focus solely on the building and managing of your coaching practice. But much of what I and others have found to be critical to the success of a professional executive coach is how to conduct the actual coaching and support our coaching clients. As a result, this book has ended up being as much about the coaching itself as it is about building and managing a coaching practice.

If you are looking for an academic treatise on research and standards, I encourage you to look elsewhere. This book is for the practical professional with a passion for helping leaders do great things through executive coaching. I wish you the same satisfaction that I continue to experience in my work as a professional executive coach.

Acknowledgments

Executive coaching did not really exist as a defined field when I began my work. I started as a consulting psychologist, counseling, coaching, training, and consulting in education and mental health. Three of my mentors, Murray Sholkin, Steve Sholkin, and Harry Levinson, encouraged me to apply my knowledge to the business world. I owe them all a debt of gratitude for expanding my horizons on where and how to practice.

My work in business started as training and slowly expanded into coaching and consulting. I learned so much about management, leadership, and organization development through my 9 years of work with colleagues at ODI, consulting to leaders in many industries on a global basis. My colleagues at Manchester Consulting made important contributions to the development of executive coaching systems and processes, and I owe them a great deal for sharing their experience and expertise. In the two consulting firms I have run, Focus Consulting and Stern Consulting, I have had the opportunity to work with wonderful clients and tenured professionals in all types of coaching and consulting. My thanks go to all of them for their generosity in sharing their knowledge, expertise, and support.

My professional network has inspired much of this book. I thank my colleagues and friends from the Executive Coaching Forum, the New England Society for Applied Psychology, the Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology, the Graduate School Alliance

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for Executive Coaching, and the Global Convention on Coaching. Special thanks go to my cowriters of the Executive Coaching Forum's *Executive Coaching Handbook* and *Core Competencies of the Executive Coach*, the foundation on which so much of this book rests. Beyond these more formal groups, there are so many other people from whom I continually learn and receive support. Thank you all for easing the loneliness of the executive coach with your community of shared learning. I would also thank all of my students and supervisees for teaching me through their own wisdom and learning.

As I worked on compiling the Appendix for this book, I found it especially interesting that professionals from different backgrounds and geographic locations recommended very different resources. Executive coaching is truly a diverse discipline.

I have learned about the professional practice of executive coaching from so many sources. Each of them has informed me in my thinking and the resources I use. I cannot acknowledge all of those people here; instead I list the individuals who responded to my request to recommend resources for this book. Thanks to them all for their serious consideration and time in providing their recommendations:

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As part of my “day job,” I have written many handbooks, training manuals, articles, and tools for my clients, students, and other

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coaches and consultants. When I began to develop this book, however, it quickly became evident that I would have to take time away from family and friends. I thank them all for their unfailing encouragement. My daughters have been the greatest of supports, with Abbie, the younger, serving as my editor and formatter as I began to pull the book together. And of course my dog Samantha was always beside me as I wrote, inspiring me and exerting her calming influence whenever papers flew or the computer malfunctioned yet again.

The person who has shown the greatest patience and support for my work, even when it took time away from the rest of our life, is my wife Jean. She is my coach and mentor. I thank her for being there for me every step of the way, in this process and in our life.

Is Executive Coaching Right for You?

Many people are attracted to the field of executive coaching. After all, as a coach you are regarded as an expert with the ability to help others succeed and be happy at their game. Doing anything called “executive” sounds professional, smart, and prestigious. As an executive coach with several decades of experience and director of a graduate program in Executive Coaching, I get calls just about every week from a wide variety of people wanting to enter the field.

Exciting and satisfying as it is, this field is not for everybody. To qualify as an executive coach, you need certain attributes as well as a great deal of education, preparation, experience, continuous learning, and support. I have written this book to help—whether you are considering getting into the field; preparing to practice; or already practicing and looking for guidance, strategies, tools, and resources to build and manage your consultancy. This is not an academic study of the history of executive coaching nor does it contain a detailed discussion of the theory of executive coaching. Rather, this is a practical guide based on my experience as one professional, coupled with the advice many of my colleagues have shared with me.

IS EXECUTIVE COACHING RIGHT FOR YOU?

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE COACHING?

Let's begin by examining what makes executive coaching different from other forms of coaching, counseling, and consulting. In the work I have been privileged to do as a member of a number of groups of experts in the field of executive coaching, there have been several key attributes that define and separate executive coaching from other kinds of consulting. Most executive coaching is done with leaders or would-be leaders of organizations. (A leader is loosely defined as anyone working in an organization who can have significant influence on the mission, direction, strategy, or long-term success of that organization.) Historically, although the term *executive coaching* has most commonly referred to this type of work, it is not in any way restricted to coaching people considered to be "executives."

The organizations that provide executive coaching range from big businesses to small family-owned enterprises, from government agencies to hospitals, nonprofits to universities, and public and private schools to venture capital firms, law firms, and advertising agencies. Certain industries, such as high technology and financial services, began using executive coaching as early as the 1980s and 1990s. Most industry sectors have jumped on the bandwagon by now, with a good number of organizations providing coaching. The industries that got an earlier start appear to be doing more proactive, developmental coaching for people with high potential, or those entering critical roles, or expanding their leadership responsibilities.

Five to 10 years ago, executive coaching was primarily remedial in nature: "fixing" people, solving performance problems, or putting out fires set by poor leadership. Today, that pattern has reversed itself, with most organizations focusing their executive coaching on developing leadership capabilities and achieving strategic organizational results in a proactive fashion. Some industries and organizations that have only recently embraced executive coaching are just beginning to focus on proactive development and results versus remediation. But there is no question that just about

What Is Executive Coaching?

all industries and types of organizations are providing executive coaching. Given these varied client groups and coaching mandates, the work of the executive coach often overlaps with the larger scopes of leadership development, organization development, and management consulting.

A basic definition of executive coaching is derived from the work of the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (2007, p. 1) and the Executive Coaching Forum (2004, p. 19):

Executive coaching is a development process that builds a leader's or would-be leader's capabilities to achieve professional and organizational goals. This coaching is conducted through one-on-one and group interactions, driven by evidence/data from multiple perspectives, and is based on mutual trust and respect. The coach, individuals being coached, and their organizations work in partnership to help achieve the agreed upon goals of the coaching.

This approach to developing leaders and facilitating organizational results can be provided by line managers, human resources professionals, management consultants, training and development professionals, and just about anyone in the position to help others become better leaders and achieve results. The executive coach for whom this book is written is not just someone who coaches leaders and tries to accomplish these goals. Rather, it takes a highly educated and trained professional who is well prepared to tackle any client's needs in these areas. Successful practitioners must have access to a wide variety of resources, plus a system, process, and support to provide executive coaching according to professional standards as described in this book.

Job of the Professional Executive Coach

Executive coaching is one of the many approaches in the repertoire management and leadership consultants employ. Consultants assess organizational situations and help the leaders and members involved improve their effectiveness and results. Some consultants

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do a lot of one-on-one and group development, advising leaders and would-be leaders in client organizations. When they are applying those approaches, consultants are serving as executive coaches. They consider themselves, or are considered by others, to be professional executive coaches for several reasons.

Professional executive coaching has four defining factors:

1. Executive coaches often focus a great deal of their consulting practice on one-on-one and group coaching.
2. They often employ a more structured process in their coaching work, such as following a set protocol of pre-coaching activities, assessment, and goal setting.
3. Their clients may seek them out specifically for executive coaching, asking them to follow the organization's guidelines or other standards for coaching.
4. They may contract for coaching work differently than for other consulting projects when it comes to confidentiality, data gathering, communication, project management, payment, and other terms and logistics of their work.

Many coaches who work with people on personal, career, financial, or other issues aspire to do executive coaching. Their motivations are as diverse as the coaches themselves. Some want to make more money. Others are fascinated by the challenges of business or organizational leadership. And still others are seeking prestige or the stimulation of working with especially smart and interesting people. But just imagine that you are a financial coach with a background in accounting or investment strategies. Your ability to help your clients depends not only on your basic coaching skills but, perhaps more importantly, on possessing the knowledge and expertise each unique client needs. When you work with a young couple just starting to invest for their children's education or their own retirement, or to ensure care for their aging parents, you must be knowledgeable and experienced in all of these areas. If your client's needs require you to have special knowledge in areas in which you lack expertise, such as international bonds or

What Is Executive Coaching?

eldercare law, then you must be able to refer your client to a reliable resource network.

Similarly, as an executive coach you must have basic knowledge and experience of what most leaders and would-be leaders know and do. You need as much education, training, and experience in the specialty areas of executive coaching as the financial coach has in finance. Whether you are a personal coach, career coach, financial coach, or training and development specialist, you will not be effective as an executive coach without the requisite education, training, and expertise.

Executive Coaches Are Different

Professional executive coaches have much in common with many coaches (sports, academic, personal, career, spiritual, marital, financial, communication, parenting, and so many others). Most, regardless of their specialization:

- Work one-on-one and with small groups of people
- Help clients understand what they want to accomplish and what it will take to accomplish it
- Provide expertise and guidance to help clients improve themselves, change their behaviors, make decisions, plan to accomplish their goals, and carry through with those plans
- Reassure and help clients build and maintain self-confidence and a positive attitude in the face of difficult challenges, self-doubt, and emotional lows as well as high stress and new opportunities
- Provide focus, validate, do reality testing, and help clients think differently to break out of mental mindsets and be innovative

All coaches provide this help by bringing to the coaching relationship sound and basic coaching skills as well as a strong base of knowledge and expertise in their area of specialization. The best tennis coaches are not only good at these activities, but they also know a lot about the game of tennis and are experienced in