

Tips on How to Conduct a Chemistry Meeting with a Potential Executive Coach

Tip 1: Coaching is an alliance between two equals

Chemistry, your coach needs to be someone you trust and respect.

Skills, your coach's role is to assist you with attaining a high level of performance on specific goals, as well as helping you reach your growth potential in your career. Choose a coach with the right knowledge, skills, and experience to help you.

Accessibility, your coach should work with you to identify an optimal approach to working together. Choose a coach whose availability is consistent with your needs in balancing face-to-face and virtual coaching, duration of sessions, and general accessibility.

Tip 2: Look for key qualities of an effective coach

Both during your initial chemistry meetings and once you've begun a coaching engagement with your selected coach, you should be refining and adjusting your assessment of how effective the coach will be in helping you to achieve your coaching objectives.

The following are characteristics and behaviors of an effective coach (adapted from *Choosing an Executive Coach*, by Miller & Hart):

Good listener, able to pick up on what you say and discern the thoughts and feelings behind your words. They should be able to confront and challenge statements with which he or she disagrees. They should be straightforward in manner, not afraid to ask for clarification. They should use your initial conversation to build rapport and trust, not simply to get hired.

Credibility and authenticity, you have to get a sense that the coach is genuine and straightforward. The coach should be providing something more concrete and real in the responses to your questions.

Strong ethical sense. Your coach should be sensitive to confidentiality. Beware of coaches that brag about other clients or gossip about other organizations. Your coach should also exhibit honesty and integrity, and be strong enough to tell you the truth even when you'd rather not hear it.

Positive focus. Coaching works best when it's built on leveraging strengths rather than on fixing deficiencies. Your skills and resourcefulness are the primary sources of your capacity for growth and change. Look for signs that the prospective coach recognizes and respects your strengths and has the confidence that they will carry you through the challenges of making the changes that will make you a more effective leader.

Business knowledge and focus. Coaching sessions are not informal conversations, and coaches are not cheerleaders or sympathetic ears. A coach must have sufficient understanding of business and organizational politics to help you identify, understand, and respond appropriately to situations and dilemmas that arise during the coaching process.

Tip 3: Learn about your coach to find out if he/she is a right fit for you

Read your potential coach Bio before the meeting, and select some of these questions for your chemistry meeting:

1. Could you share some highlights of your career and what made you decide to become a coach?
2. What organizations have you worked with that may offer similar challenges like those I am addressing?
3. What is your approach to coaching?
4. What types of clients do you work with most effectively?
5. How will we measure improvement/success on our coaching engagement?