



4 Right Reasons to Choose an Executive Coach **Bruce E. Roselle**

In the course of my 30 year career as an executive coach, I have sometimes been in the circumstance where the executive considering me as a coach is also interviewing other potential coaches. Thankfully, these win-lose situations usually have resulted in the executive choosing me.

In most situations where I have not been chosen, it has been for legitimate reasons and strongly held beliefs. For example, I have not been picked several times, because the executive preferred to work with a female. Next most frequent as a reason is that I am Caucasian, and they preferred to work with someone of color. The third most frequent legitimate reason is that I was perceived as either too structured or too open-ended to suit the approach they thought would work best for their style.

All these explanations for not choosing a coach make sense to me and seem to be legitimate reasons that an executive would hesitate to choose a particular coach—especially if the beliefs are very strong and not likely to shift with further discussion.

However, I have also heard a few reasons for not choosing me as a coach that I think should be questioned by the organizations paying for the coaching. Here are the particularly problematic reasons for not being chosen:

- **“We clicked immediately.”** While it’s true that working with a coach who makes your skin crawl or whose voice is like fingernails running down a chalkboard would be painful, coaching is distinct from choosing your new best friend or picking someone with whom to eat lunch or have a drink at a conference happy hour.
- **“The other guy seemed more fun.”** Working with a dour, humorless person as a coach is probably not a desirable situation for anyone, but, seriously, coaching is a working relationship in which the coach provides what the executive needs to be more highly effective. It’s designed to be a working relationship, not a play date.
- **“The chemistry wasn’t right.”** This makes sense, to a degree, because there should be a feeling that the coach and participant can work well together. Since most coaching participants have

not previously worked with a coach, they don't actually have a good idea of what the chemistry should be for growth to occur.

How to choose for the right reasons. Since coaching is the interaction that occurs within a trusting relationship in which the coach equips others with the information, perspective, support, and opportunities they need to help them develop, it is important to choose a coach thoughtfully. Here are four legitimate reasons for choosing an executive coach:

- **This coach complements my style.** Ideally, that means the person has an approach that will help move the coaching work forward. For example, if you are more detail and short-term focused, someone with a strategic and future oriented approach can help you broaden your leadership approach. Or, if you tend to be very serious and somewhat awkward around people, a coach who has a sense of humor and is more relationship focused can help pull out this side of you.
- **This coach brings a depth of expertise in an area that will help me.** If the informal feedback you have received from your boss and others is that you need to exhibit a greater level of business savvy, working with an expert in that area can fill in gaps. Or, if you tend to over-react to situations and easily get your buttons pushed under stress, a coach who has expertise in the role that fears and faulty beliefs play can help you learn to stop reacting and start responding more effectively.
- **This coach is strong enough to challenge me.** This might be important to you, because you are a strong, aggressive personality yourself and need someone to call you on your stuff. Or, you might tend to be passive and avoidant as a style, and you need someone to challenge you to become more consistently and confidently assertive with others. Coaching is not therapy, and organizations paying for coaches want to see real, measurable change, so you need to be challenged.
- **This coach creates a safe space in which to grow.** At the same time you need someone to challenge you, it is also critically important to work with a coach who provides a safe place in which to grow. That is, a person who will work to understand you deeply on the front end, encourage the behaviors that you both want to see more of, and notice/reinforce the steps you take to become more effective.

The best strategy in choosing an executive coach is to combine all four of these to find the ideal fit. Whether you are paying for the coaching yourself or your organization is paying for it, it is important to be a wise consumer. Your career future just might hang in the balance.