



## Executive 2.0

Photo: Andrew SvK

# Navigating the first 100 days: Do you need an executive coach?

There are executive coaches and there are personal branding coaches. But finding someone who does both is a unique way to help you both navigate the complexities of business - particularly in the first 100 days of your role - and differentiate yourself from other top-level leaders.

## How an executive branding coach can help you

If you're starting out in your first C-suite role, an external coach can act as a vital and impartial sounding board. It may be someone 10-15 years older than you who has similar experience and who knows the pitfalls of your industry. Or it may be a specialist coach experienced in guiding leaders in executive roles.

With new board roles, whether internal or external, there will always be jealous colleagues who perceive your career move to have blocked theirs. You will encounter resistance that will challenge you. An external coach can offer an objective insight and help you manage these situations. If in your new role you have crossed over from one industry to another, you'll benefit from a coach who is an industry expert. For example, if you've come from a dairy company and moved to a packaging company, try to find a top leader in packaging who can be a sounding board and share their specialist knowledge with you.



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Clients come to me with requests for coaching on multiple elements of their leadership careers and the impact on their confidence can be dramatic. Now, I am not a certified coach for onboarding matters and everyone needs different input at different times. But there is some advice that is universal.

### Take time to talk to stakeholders

When you start a top-level leadership role - as CEO, MD or GM of a firm - reserve 20% of your time for stakeholder management. In the first 100 days, you'll be expected to present an idea and a plan, but make sure you keep the stakeholders involved.

Your stakeholder(s) can be the shareholder(s) or the Private Equity firm or the Non Executive Board or the international Board of Directors. Define who they are and then carefully plan time together with them on a regular frequency.

Having a dinner before the AGM isn't enough. Allow for half a day and invite your stakeholders for one-to-one meetings so you can get to know each other better. Take your shareholder to a client event or on a factory or warehouse tour. Spend two hours in the car or on a flight with them — talk beyond work and find out about their interests and their family life.

Through taking time to talk with shareholders individually you will gain unique insights. You might learn that they pitched a similar business idea to yours three years ago and it was knocked out. Then you know you need to prepare the idea in a different and better way.

### Invest in team coaching

Take time to nurture and understand new team dynamics. Recognise that people have differences and learn to accept them. A leadership team doesn't have to be friends, but they do need to know each other well, and team coaching can help them work together for a common goal.

As a new CEO, ask if team coaching is already part of the culture and if there is a budget available to invest in your teams — you will create a far better strategic plan if you have first worked on your team chemistry.



Enhancing the dynamics of a team needs to be worked on continuously — teams should receive coaching from a designated team coach at least once, if not twice, a year. The team coach can work on clashes within the team but remember that each board member must have a separate, personal coach who focuses on the individual's leadership role. And it's important that these two remain distinct. Personally, I am convinced that the team coach should not be the individual coach of one of the team members. That would create a breach of trust for the other team members.

Find a coach who's not always nice to you. Just as bedside manner isn't always necessary to be a great doctor, a coach who dares to say what you need to hear is best placed to get you in peak condition to excel in your leadership role.

### Coaching for presence and presentation

The best executive branding coaches will explore how leaders present themselves in terms of clothing, accessories and hairstyles. <Link to Blog 2 Executive branding - what can we learn from Neelie Kroes?> Outside image is a key part of defining your executive brand, so if you're uncertain if you're sending the right message, seek coaching in that area.

Coaching can also address behaviour, confidence and personal presence. Some coaches specialise in the use of drama techniques to help improve presenting and public speaking skills, for example. In several countries the academy of drama offers special courses for managers to get more familiar with acting on stage.

If you have media exposure, your company should invest in coaching to put you at ease, but it's important to know your limits. As a CEO, it is reasonable to delegate media communications to the press office.

### Harness insight from experience

Sometimes the answers can be found in your own experience. As one of my previous bosses always said, "Experience is a skill in itself."



I started my career as a sales rep at P&G. Every day I would leave my student room, get in my car and drive around visiting clients and retail shops, selling laundry detergent. Seven years later when I'd become a Sales Director in Italy leading 27 remote sales representatives out on the road, my early experiences guided my leadership and gave me the insight and skills I needed to coach my team.

Use your own experience and experiences from your network to find out the best ways to fill gaps in your capability — coaching may not always come from one person. For example, when I wanted to familiarise myself with digital marketing, I asked some top marketers what training they would recommend, and I took that course. I'm still not an expert but I now recognise good digital marketing and I am better equipped to ask CMOs the right questions.

Want to know more? Get in touch <[link to contact](#)> with me to enrich your leadership performance with executive branding coaching — and bring your way forward into focus.

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