

## *Chapter 8*

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# Coaching for Career Development

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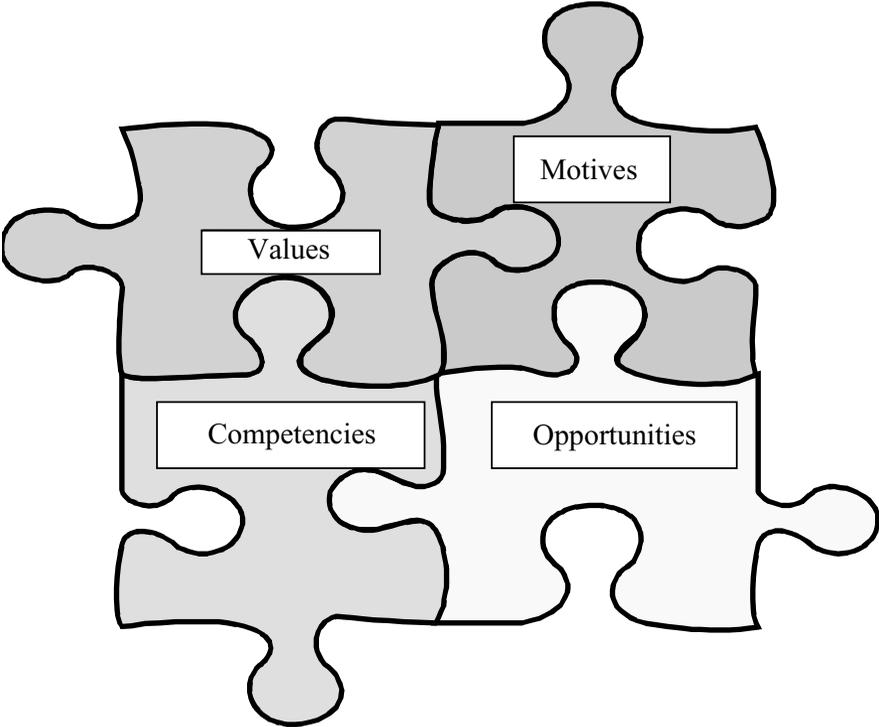
If you are a manager who has developed a relationship of mutual respect with your team, individuals will likely look to you for advice and support for making progress in their careers. This is a special application of the coaching skills we have discussed so far. To offer useful career coaching, you need to explore issues that go beyond the workplace and take into account the whole person, his or her stage in life, family issues, and lifestyle. The first part of this chapter presents a career development model that provides a road map in coaching leaders at critical junctures in their careers; it is what I call the “puzzle of career development.” After discussing the model, we apply it to two coaching situations that you may frequently encounter: first, with high-potential junior people on the first few rungs of their management career, and second, with seasoned senior leaders at mid-career crossroads.

### **Putting the Career Development Puzzle Together**

Think of what motivated you to take your own career steps. Our path is often not a straightforward one but rather it takes unexpected twists and turns based on a combination of what we thought we were good at in school, what we learn about ourselves from the experiences we have had, what we have been

successful in, and what opportunities came our way. Perhaps we were lucky enough to have a coach or mentor along the way. Maybe life experiences outside the job, such as a new baby or a divorce, have also impacted choices we felt we needed to make about work.

When coaching someone else about his career, it's important to understand that his competency strengths and potential are important, but you also need to learn what is important to that person: what his values are and what needs and concerns he has in balancing work with the rest of his life. Use the career development puzzle (see Figure 8.1) as a model of career decision-making can help you coach others. Make sure you have not overlooked an important piece of the puzzle in considering how personal options impact career ambition.



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**Figure 8.1** Pieces of the career development puzzle.

## Values Help Us Prioritize What Is Most Important

Most of us would like to have it all: money, fame, power, and adventure as well as family happiness, economic security, wisdom, and health. With maturity comes an understanding that while we can have a lot of what we want in our lives, probably more than most of us realize, we can't have it all. We make decisions and prioritize what is most important. In fact, those priorities may shift in each stage of our lives. Someone who in her twenties was more interested in challenging assignments and making a professional name for herself, may become more focused on flexibility in balancing life and work when family concerns are added to the mix.

Exploring personal values with the leader you are coaching can provide a powerful foundation for a process of self-discovery. I recommend exploring these issues in your coaching sessions as well as asking the leader to do some "homework" using values clarification exercises (see box) between coaching sessions.

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### *Coaching Tips ...*

The following are two good values clarification exercises to use:

- Take the list of values shown in [Figure 8.2](#), and think about what was important to you in the past, what is important now, and how your values might change in the future. Tell the leader to prioritize five of the listed values in each category. Discuss how and why the leader selected the values, and what issues came up when she was going through this process.
- Ask the leader to think of herself at retirement age and to write a one- or two-page article that would summarize her career, management philosophy, and contributions to the organizations she was a part of, as it might appear in *Fortune* magazine. Encourage her to use her imagination and to put things in the article even if she is not sure, at this point, how they are going to happen. Discuss the article with her in terms of how strongly it reflects, or fails to reflect, her important values. Ask her to share with you what she was thinking about when writing the article. Did she have trouble imagining the future and if so, why? Where are the gaps between where she is now and where she wants to be?

## Values Clarification

Look through the following list of personal values and think about what was important to you in the past and present, and how you anticipate the future. In each column, select five values of highest importance to you at these different life stages. The high values reflect those that give you the *most satisfaction*. Reflect on how your values have changed or stayed the same throughout your lifetime and the impact this has had on prior and current career choices.

<i>Personal Values</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
Achievement	Sense of accomplishment, mastery			
Advancement	Promotion			
Excitement	Requiring risk and producing high levels of stimulation and activity			
Fame	Being famous, well known as an expert			
Competitiveness	Engaging in win-lose situations; taking risks			
Teamwork	Working collaboratively with others			
Creativity	Being imaginative, innovative			
Economic security	Steady, adequate income			
Autonomy	Independence and freedom to do one's work			
Family happiness	Maintaining a work and family balance			
Service	Assisting others, improving society			
Friendship	Close relationships with others			
Health	Being physically and mentally well			
Power	Being able to influence the opinions and attitudes of people, to effect change			
				<i>- continued</i>

**Figure 8.2** Values clarification exercise.

<i>Personal Values</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
Inner harmony	Being at peace with oneself			
Integrity	Honesty, sincerity, being consistent with your ethics			
Participation	Involvement with your peer group, a sense of belonging			
Heritage	Respect for the traditions and the philosophy of the organization			
Professional development	Continuing to learn and expand one's skills and abilities			
Wealth	Making money, getting rich			
Power	Control, authority, influence over others			
Recognition	Respect from others, status			
Geographic preference	Living in the location of one's choice			
Fairness	Being treated with respect by others and being in a workplace that values diversity			
Self respect	Pride, sense of personal identity			
Social consciousness	Contributing to the wellbeing of the community, the environment, or the globe			
Wisdom	Understanding life, discovering knowledge			

**Figure 8.2 (continued) Values clarification exercise.**

## Motives Arouse Us to Action

Understanding motivation is as important in coaching for career development as it is for performance improvement. The more insight a leader can have about what is really important to him, both in terms of values and motives, the more of a genuine commitment he can make to take the actions that directly lead to his goals. People are interested in things such as recognition, being liked, doing something they think is important, or increasing power and influence. No one comes to work and says “I’m really in the mood this morning to write the last version of the report that I’m sending to the board for its review.” What he is thinking about is how to get in his supervisor’s favor and be in line for a desired promotion, or how to make a contribution and escape too much scrutiny before retirement.

What you can do as a coach is to deeply listen for people’s motivations in how they express their aspirations and hopes, and what is really important to them. Is what they describe as being paramount congruent with how they spend their time, both inside and outside the workplace? A gap, or lack of congruency, may be a sign that their values and motives are not aligned. It is not uncommon that when people stop and reflect on where they want to go with their careers, they realize that there can be a conflict between their values and their motives, and that this is what is keeping them mentally stuck and unsure of the next path to pursue.

### A Case in Point ...

Sally was a vice president of human resources for a division of a major multinational service company. She had an advanced degree in industrial relations from an Ivy League school and always had been on the fast track with her career, working for big companies and quickly assuming positions of greater responsibilities. She liked the challenge of her current position and enjoyed the power that came with orchestrating things behind the scenes. Line managers saw her as someone who could be objective and knowledgeable in resolving labor management disputes and frequently sought her out. Part of the problem, however, was that Sally was frequently on a plane traveling to the company’s far-reaching operations, and Sally also felt a responsibility to her two school-age children. Sally was a trusted advisor of senior corporate management, and as the company continued to grow, she was being tapped for positions that would broaden her scope of accountability.

Sally sought out a career coach to help her resolve her ambivalence about where to go with her career. Her coach helped her identify that while leadership positions are typically sought by those with a high need for power, in Sally's case, the leadership position was appealing because of her achievement drive, and in big organizations, one of the ways achievement is recognized is through promotions and higher job titles. Sally was no slacker in the motives of affiliation and power, but those were relatively less dominant in driving Sally's actions and decisions.

Sally took a more introspective look at her own motives in relationship to her personal values. A highly ranked value for her was family happiness, and she was acutely aware of how quickly her children were growing up. After further coaching, it also became clear to Sally that while economic security was important as a value, amassing wealth was far less important. In looking at her motive needs alongside of her values, the personal stress that the corporate travel was creating became apparent.

Sally realized that she didn't need a big paycheck to take care of her family and could give up the prestige of the title of vice president, as long as she maintained her professional contacts and continued to be involved in creative and interesting projects. After the self-reflection that occurred as a result of the coaching, Sally was able to make the decision to leave her corporate career, at least for the time being, in favor of freelance assignments that would give her much greater flexibility to spend more time with her growing family.

As in Sally's case, it is only after looking at someone's motives in relationship to her values that points of friction can be identified. Once the career issues become clearer, it becomes easier to figure out how to resolve them.

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### *Coaching Tips ...*

Ask yourself the following questions when coaching:

- What are the underlying motivators for the person I am coaching? Are they in alignment with what she is doing now and what she wants to be doing with her career?
  - Are his motives and values consistent, or are they pulling her in different directions?
  - Will she need to work on developing any of the three motivational factors (achievement, affiliation, and power) to achieve her career goal?
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## **Competencies for Career Progress Need to Be Identified**

Understanding how others perceive the leader's competencies plays a significant role in career development as it does in performance improvement. However, the focus in career coaching is not only the leader's current capabilities but also his potential. Discover how committed the leader is to work on developing the competencies that may be required for future positions. As a coach, you can help the leader identify competency requirements he needs to be promoted or to expand his role in a new direction.

For example, consider the competency of political awareness. This competency is increasingly important for leadership success and can derail an otherwise successful executive in his career. Disdain or disinterest in organizational politics is a liability and hinders an executive's ability to mobilize support and get ideas implemented. Lack of political awareness directly limits a leader's ability to impact and influence an organization.

### *A Case in Point ...*

One of our clients, Jim, had a high-profile job earlier in his career as a finance director for products development of a toy company. He reported to the senior vice president of sales, who was a hard-charging, "take no prisoners" type of leader. At one critical project review, Jim was asked to provide a financial analysis on potential acquisitions in a meeting with the president of the company and other senior executives. As finance director, Jim had to balance his need to take a hard look at the numbers with supporting his peers on the executive team who were clearly strong advocates of the proposal.

In one unfortunate meeting, he blindsided the vice president of marketing, Donna, with numbers that failed to support the case she was making on a pet project. Jim didn't let her know that there was a problem with the numbers she was presenting prior to the formal meeting with their supervisor. Years later, when Jim was up for a promotion, she had been promoted several times to reach the senior executive rank and was asked her opinion of Jim's potential. She raised vague doubts about Jim's leadership style, and her objections were enough to derail his career.

Jim was taken by surprise by the consequences of an error in judgment that had occurred years ago. It wasn't until he began a process of career coaching and received 360-degree feedback that he was able to see a link between this prior event and the fact that his career in the company seemed to be stymied.

Coaching people on this competency often involves helping them to read their environment and to pick up on signals from others that they may have been ignoring. This involves paying better attention and keeping one's eyes and ears open to relationships and emerging coalitions as well as reflecting on others' motivations.

Coaching a leader on a more complex competency such as political awareness also requires the ability to reframe issues from a perspective that the leader may have not previously considered. When people think about things differently, they usually act differently. For example, in our story about Jim, one of the factors that helped create the misstep was his relationship with Tom, the vice president of sales. Jim thought that he and Tom were personal friends; after all, he was usually invited to the annual Christmas party that was held at Tom's home. Jim paid little attention to the fact that Tom was frequently at odds with Donna, the VP of marketing, and saw her as a competitor for the president's job when he retired. Tom had encouraged Jim to present the numbers at this very public meeting. Jim was naive and never considered that his "friend" would try to manipulate him to further his own ambitions. To help get Jim's career back on track, he needed to learn to view his relationships in the workplace as more complex than he was used to viewing them in other areas of his life.

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*Coaching Tips ...*

- **Shadow the leader and watch him in action** — You can compare your own reaction to situations of the leader you are coaching and see where there are similarities and gaps in perspective.
  - **Identify underlying assumptions and beliefs** — These beliefs may have curtailed competency development. For example, Jim’s rationale was “I hate playing company politics.” Help develop a new frame of reference, and provide ideas on how to get started developing new practices.
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## Opportunities Need to Be Realistically Assessed

Opportunities are the fourth component of our career development puzzle. You may be coaching someone who has all the values, motives, and competencies to be president of your company. Yet if your company is run by the founding family, for example, it is unlikely that this will be a viable opportunity. However, you can help the leader you are coaching to think outside of the box of existing jobs and roles. By more deeply examining values, motives, and competencies first, you can get a more complete picture of what this leader enjoys doing, is excited about, and wants to learn.

Don’t limit your exploration of opportunities to existing jobs and roles. Work with the leader to explore future trends for your company, in the industry, and in the leader’s professional field. For example, how will changes in the economy, technology, and globalization impact career opportunities in the future? Organizational change always expands the requirements for talents in some areas while contracting others. Expanding our awareness of these trends gives us valuable information to make decisions and to take actions that can broaden our view of career possibilities.

When coaching a leader for his career advancement, be realistic. Most corporate organizations are still pyramid shaped, and far fewer opportunities exist at the top than at the bottom and in the middle. If you are coaching someone who is already in a leadership position, promotional opportunities may be limited. Coaching may be tricky in this case. You want to be honest, and yet you don’t want to demotivate someone who is making a valuable contribution in her current position, but is looking for something more.

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## *Coaching Tips ...*

- **Look for opportunities to tackle cross-functional problems** — The opportunities for personal and financial growth often come from being in a position to tackle problems and address issues that cross functional lines. As a leader becomes more adept at managing the interfaces between functional silos, he becomes a more valuable player for his organization.
- **Help the leader develop competencies** — Develop the competencies of political and organization awareness, and understand the social network of decision-makers that both formally and informally impact opportunities for advancement.
- **Strengthen the competency of strategic thinking** — Focus the leader on increasing her awareness of environmental changes (technological, economic, political, sociocultural, or interpersonal) that will occur in the near future (one to five years), and help her understand how this may impact career opportunities.
- **Understand how new problems can be opportunities** — New jobs arise all the time in organizations. They often arise because new problems need to be solved. Leaders who can anticipate the issues that the organization is likely to face and are prepared to tackle them can put themselves in a position of career advantage.

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Using the overview of the four parts of the career development puzzle (values, motives, competencies, and opportunities), your career-coaching approach can be tailored for people at different points in their careers. While a person's career has many stages, you most frequently encounter two of these as a coach: the leader early in his career who you see as having a high potential and the leader who is at a more advanced stage and may have reached a career plateau.

## ***Coaching the High-Potential Leader***

You hired the best and the brightest. Now you must keep them motivated and prepare them to take on greater challenges in the future. Your job is to identify talent and to make sure that your people are getting the experience and exposure they need to assume increasingly higher levels of leadership positions. It is surprising how many high-potential people jump ship for opportunities elsewhere because they feel that no one is looking out for them. By the time they are recruited elsewhere, it is too late. This is especially true for high-potential people who are already at the initial rungs of the managerial ladder. Grooming the next generation of leadership is an important aspect of long-term planning.

### ***Become a Mentor***

If you wait for a real go-getter to come to you for a career development discussion, the discussion may become a case of “too little too late.” If the request for this discussion comes out of the blue, it may be a sign that the person is feeling underutilized and already has feelers out in the job market. As a mentor, you can offer perspective, knowledge, and insight to help someone prepare for greater leadership roles within your organization.

Tom Dimmick, the vice president of human resources at InterMetro Industries, a division of Emerson, talked to me about the impact of a mentor who he had earlier in his career. He recalled his mentor as follows: “He had the ability to get people to believe that the conversation they were having with him was the most important thing he could do with his time. Nothing ranked up there with that. He remembered each person as a unique individual, he validated their efforts, and he rewarded their achievements. He punished not their failures but their foolishness. Foolishness got punished; failures got discussed.”

Is a mentor the same as a coach? Mentoring is a form of coaching and certainly requires the skills and competencies that we have already discussed. However, a mentor can play an important additional role, and that is as an advocate or sponsor for the leader within your organization. What can often be helpful for leaders in the early stages of their careers is exposure to different senior leaders and different parts of the business as well as opportunities to demonstrate their competencies on high-visibility projects. As a mentor, you can go beyond merely suggesting these as ideas for development and actively open the doors by speaking the leader's praises or suggesting her name when key opportunities arise.

As a leader at InterMetro, Tom Dimmick is now in the position to pass on to others the coaching that he received earlier in his career. He tries to be an

advocate for his staff within the company as well as to ensure that he makes the time to be a behind-the-scenes sounding board for their ideas and strategies. Tom said that using a competency approach has become a strong basis for his coaching. Competencies have enabled him to create a common framework with his team to help direct their success at InterMetro. He told us a story about mentoring a direct report who has continued to grow in her career through a series of higher positions throughout the company. As part of his mentoring, he has been trying to maximize her exposure to senior people both within Metro and in the larger parent company, Emerson. As he said, "I can't make her successful, but I can give her opportunities and coach her. She is the one who has to be successful." His approach is not to wait for the formal coaching opportunities but to touch base with her frequently on an informal basis and to offer recognition for small accomplishments as they occur. He wants her to know that she is a valued member of his team and to take the risks that are required to continue to develop her competencies in new situations.

Because developing leaders is so vital to sustaining the success of an organization, coaching high-potential employees should go beyond the discretion of individual managers to become part of a systematic approach to leadership development. Identifying and coaching people for increasing levels of leadership responsibility should be part of every senior manager's accountability.

#### A Case in Point ...

Beth Rubino, the director of human resources development and training at QVC, has made it her mission to meet the strategic needs of the company for growth by instituting a program that regularly reviews all leadership potential at all levels of management.

"We are always opening new phone and distribution centers, and need to populate these locations with some of our current leadership team. We want to pick the best of the best of the current team to seed the new site, because that is our best shot to build a culture that is going to support us in the long run. In order to do that, we need to get the next level of leaders ready. We need to systematically know who they are, where they are, and that they will they be able to move on.

"The result of this systematic assessment is that we know where our talent is. We know their strengths and how soon they are ready to be promoted. It may be this year or in three years, but we know who has potential and what we have to do to get them ready."

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## *Coaching Tips ...*

- **Sell development assignments** — We learn the most from assignments that have been tough or even stressful. Real development occurs from work we haven't done before or from people with whom it can be difficult to work. Unfortunately, even ambitious people turn down tough assignments because they can seem scary and have some risk. You may need to go the extra distance and convince the person you are coaching to get out of his comfort zone and accept a difficult job that he may not initially see as a good career move. Look for assignments that give the leader opportunities to expand his functional knowledge, increase the complexity or scale of responsibilities, make a shift from staff to line, or require a sizeable increase in the number of people managed.
- **Be altruistic** — It is difficult for all managers to give up their best people to another manager in a different area of the company. Yet it is critical to development in the early stages of a person's career to get a broad range of experience and exposure to different functional specialties and management styles. This probably means that you are grooming some of your best people to leave you.
- **Don't lose touch after the person moves on** — The coaches who can have the biggest impact on us are the ones who stay in touch as we venture forward in our careers. When we build these relationships over the course of a lifetime, the relationship continues to evolve and deepen.

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### ***Coaching the Leader at Mid-Career***

Coaching leaders who have already achieved a string of career successes and are at a career plateau presents a very different challenge. For many leaders,

success has always been measured by promotions, salary increases, and higher titles. Now at the top of their organizational pyramid, fewer of these opportunities exist. The chief legal counsel may be doing a brilliant job keeping your company out of litigation but may be yearning for something more. The dilemma is that he is doesn't have the breadth of experience to become the president or CEO. So what is next for him?

Then there are the successful leaders who are blinded by their own success. After all, they have reached a senior leadership level for a reason. Even if they have received feedback that suggested competencies in which they might improve, the results they were able to achieve to this point enabled them to dismiss or discount the feedback. Now, even though your company may have changed around them (with a new set of employees and a business strategy that calls for a new leadership style), their ingrained ways of thinking and behaving make it more difficult to change.

Compounding these issues, many senior leaders who are in their 40s and 50s find that midlife is a time of reflection. After years of striving for success, many of us who are at this stage (and I am one of them) stop and think about what we initially wanted to accomplish with our lives, how much satisfaction we are getting out of what we are currently doing, and what we can do to recharge our batteries and recapture some of the challenge and fun we experienced earlier in our lives and careers. The leader may not be completely aware that this is the issue, but she may express a vague feeling of discontent without a full understanding about its source.

## How Coaching Can Help

Senior leaders at this stage of their career engage in the coaching process from a variety of perspectives. Some initiate the process themselves, still hoping for promotional opportunities or searching for what to do next in their career. Others are more in a crisis mode, realizing that their career has come to a standstill, and are unsure about what to do. The four parts of our career development puzzle can provide a map for coaching on these issues. Assessing what the leader wants and how aware he is of his own values, motives, and competencies provides valuable clues for insight into which direction to pursue.

Recognize that part of this reflection may include a deeper search for personal meaning. Questions like "What do I want to do with the rest of my life?" or "What legacy would I like to leave this organization?" touch on profound areas for some. New interests often emerge during midlife that can provide the coach with valuable clues about motives and competencies that have been lying dormant and are waiting to be developed. Personal enthusiasms

often extend far beyond the workplace and can include such things as travel, painting, gardening, or becoming a leader in a community organization. These new interests often come from a deeper longing and don't seem logical or sensible at first. In her book *Executive Coaching*, Catherine Fitzgerald states that these interests are often suggestive of psychological shifts that occur in the second half of life. She describes midlife as follows: "It is a time when people begin to get 'inklings, taps on the shoulder' with a subtle but increasingly clear message: 'We're back!'" As a coach, you can be supportive of a leader stepping out of his conventional role and connecting these outside interests to make work life more meaningful.

## When to Use an Outside Coach

Because coaching someone at this stage of her career often goes beyond issues focused on job performance, it can be desirable to bring in an external executive coach who has in-depth expertise in the interfaces among psychology, business performance, and adult learning. A leader may prefer someone from outside of the organization to explore how early family history has created beliefs, emotions, and unconscious assumptions that impact her current behavior and approach to the world. An executive coach who is skilled in exploring the impact of underlying motives on competency development can help a leader become more aware of how events from the past still shape the person she is today.

### A Case in Point ...

For Jake, high school was painful. Short and not particularly athletic, he was not picked for teams or invited to hang out with the cool kids. Jake was seen as a know-it-all in school, and the combination of his zeal for success and intelligence drove him to be first in his class. He was very competitive and felt pressure to keep up with his older brother, who was both smarter and more socially adept. Jake eventually went into business as his brother was training to be a physician. Jake was aware that his parents were proud of their older son, the doctor, and always felt that he had to prove something in their eyes.

Jake joined a financial consulting company and quickly rose through the ranks to become a partner. He was competitive and successfully went after big accounts. He was very focused and enjoyed the

environment of the firm, where success was measured in the clear terms of revenue. Jake knew how to be a winner and enjoyed the recognition for his success.

Because of his track record, Jake was responsible for the revenues of the entire region. In this role, Jake was now measured by the success of others. He was promoted to general manager because management felt that he could teach others how to be more successful by sharing with them how he got results. The problem was that Jake had gotten to where he was by essentially operating alone. While he always had one or two junior people to help with the legwork on his accounts, he treated the other senior people more as competitors than allies.

This lifelong pattern of competing with others was hard to break. When other consultants who now reported to Jake would come to him to share successes, Jake would unconsciously begin to one-up them with stories of his own accomplishments. He turned people off by offering advice before taking the time to understand their problems. This had the impact of distancing them rather than creating a relationship of trust. Jake's group failed to bring in the numbers that were expected of them, and people were complaining about Jake's management style to senior management.

Jake's career came to a crossroads when he was asked to step down as general manager and was no longer a part of the senior management team. Jake knew that his group wasn't successful, but he blamed it on the people that reported to him. He felt that he inherited a group that just wasn't strong enough to deliver the revenue that the company expected.

Coaching Jake needed to go beyond the 360-degree feedback data, which suggested that his team saw him as overbearing, a poor listener, and someone who always had to be right. By exploring childhood experiences and patterns, Jake began to see how the outdated patterns of rationalizations from his childhood were still creating an automatic response to competitive situations.

Jake's insights did not entirely eradicate his behavior but gave him more options to situations that triggered these worn-out responses. He made a career choice to accept another senior-level position that did not have people management responsibility and where he would be a "thought guru" in his area of financial management. Jake also came to the realization that committing time to community activities outside of work gave him more satisfaction than he realized; this was a realm in which he felt more comfortable leading and collaborating with others at this stage of his life.

## Expanding Choices

Understanding how the past continues to influence our underlying assumptions about people and how these assumptions create habitual patterns of responding to critical situations is particularly useful in coaching leaders in mid-career. The old behavior usually worked well in some situations; otherwise it would not have been repeated. Jake's fierce competitiveness, for example, gained him recognition both in school and on the job. However, it was dysfunctional when it came to building trust and developing members of his team. When Jake began to understand the origins of this pattern, he could be more objective and understand how others were reacting to him. Jake did not get rid of his competitive streak, but rather he expanded his behavioral options for situations that would have previously elicited an automatic response. The goal of an executive coach is to enable a leader to make a conscious choice of how to respond to situations and how to better align his behavior with the person he aspires to be.

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### *Coaching Tips ...*

- **Encourage reflection** — Encourage the leader to take time out from daily activities to get a new perspective on what is really important to her at this stage of her life. Help her to identify key themes in her life history and to see the implications for future career choices. Discussions that focus on family history and key events can be useful in identifying these patterns. Connect these observations to findings of the 360-

degree feedback and to how others currently view the leader's competencies today.

- **Look for outdated views of self** — Leaders can become stuck because they are wedded to out-of-date images of themselves. Some people make choices in their career, because “that is the kind of person I am.” For example, one leader who in his younger days was an ambitious “young Turk” and always received the accolades that go with being the best, may now need to delegate more to others on the team. Part of this change in role requires a reframing of what personal success looks like.
- **Realistically assess current career options** — Start with what the leader thinks are realistic next steps for his career. Explore his reasons for making changes. Help him connect the dots between where he is now and where he wants to be in retirement. Help him assess his choices in relationship to his competencies, values, and motives. How close is the fit and where are the significant gaps? What other career options exist that he may not have considered?
- **Help a leader who is not progressing** — When a leader is stuck in making career choices, the problem may be that he does not accurately see himself the way that other people in the organization see him. In that case, the 360-degree feedback process may be helpful. The problem may also be that the leader is conflicted between what he really wants and what he feels he should want. This is another conflict between motives and values. To clarify this conflict, ask the leader about other people who have had a major influence on him in the past, including mentors and peers, and inquire about how those relationships have shaped his career path to this point.
- **Explore outside interests** — Midlife is a time when people become curious and involved in new activities that can give them a renewed sense of energy and vitality. These interests can often give the coach important clues on what is emerging as important for this person and how to use some of this newfound

energy in designing a position that would be a more ideal fit.

- **Take risks** — Many senior leaders become insulated within their organization, especially if they have been there for a long period of time. In a quest for security, many people underestimate their own potential and the options that are available to them both inside and outside of their company. If a leader is finding his current position narrow and unfulfilling, it is not inappropriate to explore how to change directions both within and outside of the current organization.
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## A Pitfall to Avoid

Don't raise midlife issues until you have a good working relationship with the leader and have established your coaching agenda. This topic is not frequently addressed in a business context, and you need substantial credibility with your client to effectively introduce these issues and have them seen as relevant in discussing career issues.

## Summary

Providing effective career coaching is important to both the leaders and the future success of your organization. It assures retention of your best people, a succession plan that works, and people who are continuing to grow and develop in their leadership roles. For leaders who would be better served by leaving the organization, it can empower them to make a self-determined exit from the organization and leave on positive terms.

Career coaching uses the same process and tools as coaching for performance, but it takes an increased focus on the person's life history and commitments outside of the workplace. As a manager, you may extend the coaching relationship and become a mentor for this leader and an advocate on her behalf.

An outside coach can be a useful resource to augment the coaching that is done inside the organization. When effective coaching requires a greater depth of knowledge in psychology and adult development, bringing in an executive coach can give the leader a confidential resource with a broader perspective to delve more deeply into midlife issues.

## Reference

1. Fitzgerald, C. and Berger, J.G. (editors), *Executive Coaching: Practices and Perspectives*, Davis-Black, Palo Alto, CA, 2002.

