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Jerry Chautin

Lonely at the top? Professional business coach could help

It can be lonely at the top, whether you're running a corporate conglomerate or small business enterprise.

In part it's because you don't have a confidant at the office to give you honest feedback, keep you on track and help you to maximize your capabilities.

To resolve this predicament, some executives and business owners are turning to professional business coaches for help.

"Top executives, particularly CEOs and business owners, often do not have an abundance of peers with whom they feel comfortable sharing the pressures of the job, or showing uncertainty in the face of tough decisions," says Sue Engelhart, a business coach and coordinator for the Greater Sarasota Coaches Alliance, or GSCA.

The professional coaching industry transports many of the locker-room skills practiced at athletic venues to boardrooms worldwide.

"Coaching is a process that brings forth the client's innate knowledge enhanced by the coach's ability to help them tap into it for their own answers," Engelhart says. "A trusted coach provides a safe environment for a client to express anger, resentment, guilt, fear or other emotions."

Lacking personal experience with business coaching, I asked a few members of the GSCA to help me understand this fledgling industry.

Pearl Dahmen, founder of Pearl Financial Services, uses the technical skills she learned from 25 years as a certified public accountant and bridges the gap between pure coaching and consulting.

"I am more of a consultant than a coach because I direct my clients, small business owners and self-employed, in what they need to do to manage or improve their money, financial or tax situation," she said.

By comparison, Elena Pell is on a coaching assignment with a regional bank "that is providing coaching and consulting support to executives of minority business enterprises." Because of

her Hispanic heritage, Pell often takes on assignments where her bilingual and bicultural skills bring added value.

But when it came to technical banking issues, they "wisely chose to also provide these same clients with subject matter experts, consultants, to work with them on content issues so that there was a clear understanding of the distinct benefits that each of us was bringing," Pell said.

Meanwhile, Barbara Somma doesn't hesitate to use her corporate consulting skills with clients. But the founder of Defining Destiny LLC thinks it important to let them know that consulting is not the traditional role for a coach to play.

"In these cases I will advise them that I'm stepping outside of my role as a coach and provide that answer or a resource," she says.

Admittedly, I haven't found crisp language to definitively explain what professional coaches do and how they measure results. But I know several small-business owners who have benefited from hiring them.

To help you and me understand the benefits, this week has been designated "International Coaching Week" and the International Coach Federation is encouraging local chapters to plan events.

The GSCA will present three free chats on their Web site. The topics include:

- * Growing and developing your business
- * Navigating business and personal relationships
- * Reinventing yourself

For times and registration information, check out the organization's Web site at www.greatersarasotacoaches.org.

Jerry Chautin is a local volunteer business counselor with Manasota SCORE, "Counselors to America's Small Business," offering free business advice. Contact Chautin with your business questions and stories through e-mail at jkchautin@aol.com. SCORE's phone number is 955-1029 and its Web site is www.score-suncoast.org.

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