

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a silver pen and writing on a white notepad. The background is blurred, showing several people in a meeting or conference room. The text "How to Sustain the Results of Executive Coaching" is overlaid in white, bold font.

How to Sustain the Results of Executive Coaching

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Coaching is a partnership between an executive coach and a client who share an interest in the development of the client's goals and leadership aspirations. Coaching focuses on enhancing knowledge, skills, and abilities to elevate a leader's job performance. Often times, executive coaching is used as a development option for leaders who are taking on new responsibilities and/or moving into more senior level roles. At its core, coaching requires a commitment to development, an assessment to determine developmental needs, a development plan based on the assessment results, and applied strategies for growth and continuous improvement. Ultimately, through a process of self-awareness, introspection, and interpersonal communication, a client can successfully remove barriers to performance and develop the skills and motivation required for positive behavioral change, high performance and, in turn, organizational engagement.¹ This paper focuses on how to sustain the positive behavioral change resulting from coaching after the engagement has ended.

Regression Happens!

While unlikely, a reversion back to pre-coaching behavior can occur in the months following the conclusion of a coaching engagement for a variety of reasons



including a lack of resources (personal and organizational), lack of efficacy, and/or a constraining organizational climate. In any case, coaching engagements that result in stasis or regression waste money, time, effort, and organizational resources.

Sustaining Change

Lasting change requires ongoing support, reassessment, and the agility to meet changing needs. Sustaining the positive impact of coaching requires a focus on long-term actions to ensure continued development. Creating a pseudo-coaching relationship with a sponsor, a boss, or an identified mentor within the organization is one method to ensure ongoing success.

Sustaining behavioral change requires commitment from the organization as well as the client. After all, coaching in the context of the organization is as much about the organization as it is about the client. Successful coaching engagements result in positive business outcomes. Therefore, the organization has a vested interest in creating the conditions to sustain the leader's learnings as much as the leader undergoing the engagement.

Organizational Commitment

Organizations which sponsor coaching and pay consistent attention to developmental activities are more likely to sustain the leadership development of coaching clients.² Successful and sustained coaching results are found in organizations that not only welcome leadership development, but actively assist with ongoing behavioral change as an asset to their organization.

Whether coaching is built into existing succession plans, culture change initiatives, or leadership development programs, the

organization must be prepared to establish a system to monitor growth and hold the leader accountable. Generally, follow-ups after coaching can be conducted in any number of ways and should actively involve the stakeholders who played a role in the initial client assessment, such as the client's manager, peers, direct reports, and HR representative. Using stakeholders to support coaching success brings with it a home-field advantage. After all, these stakeholders know the organizational culture and practices, they have established relationships with the client, and there is a sense of comradery in the client's and organization's outcomes. Equipping internal stakeholders to help drive the client's continued development after the coach leaves is one strategy to sustain the impact of the coaching engagement.³

Coachee Commitment

Client commitment to sustaining skills developed through coaching is correlated to motivation and expectations of further development. Wasylyshn (2003) reported that the most positive coaching outcomes result from clients who are highly motivated to learn and are willing to adjust behaviors and attitudes to succeed.⁴ Research confirms the importance of all aspects of motivation in goal achievement, including high competence expectancies and fear of failure.⁵

To generate motivation for sustaining the positive impact of coaching, the client and their coach can create an end of coaching sustainability plan. Having a say in personal goal outcomes increases identification with the goals and a level of affective commitment to change. Implementation intentions, when strong, have a positive

effect on motivation and serve to secure goal attainment more often than weak implementation intentions.⁶ Beyond motivation, concrete expectations about further development are important for a client to anticipate the required effort and personal resources needed to sustain behavior over time. Therefore, the following items should be included in the post coaching sustainability plan:

- *Activities* – What activities will be involved to sustain behavior?
- *Time* – How much time will be committed to activities?
- *Effort* - How much effort will be involved?
- *Disclosure* - Who is entitled to know? Who will have access to any collected data?
- *Goals* – What further goals can be accomplished during the course of development?

Methods for Sustaining Behavior Change

Existing literature outlines several ways behavior can be sustained after coaching ends. Generally, it is advised that a client be paired with a trusted individual in the organization to help them continue their development. Best practices indicate that any of the following methods be used to sustain behavior change and continue development.

1. Mentorship

Using a mentor/mentee partnership that includes scheduled meetings to review performance is a common form of sustaining coached behaviors. Meetings ought to occur on a monthly or quarterly basis with a selected internal mentor. We

suggest the mentor and mentee agree to a long-term development plan at the end of the formal coaching program to promote and support continued growth for the client.^{7,8,9}

2. Keeping a personal journal

To increase awareness and stay focused on continued development, we recommend clients keep a personal journal in order to evaluate interactions with others and recount experiences after a coaching engagement has ended.

3. Peer Coaching

In cases where a group of individuals are undergoing organization-sponsored coaching engagements, regular group-based meetings may help to produce a sense of comradery, mutual encouragement, and mutual accountability to goals.

4. Spot Checking

Spot-checks are periods of time where coaches conduct brief check-ins with clients to gauge progress and to refocus the client's goals. After check-ins are completed, the coach will share check-in results with the client, and/or internal sponsors. Meetings may be held with a boss or program sponsor to review results and keep the organization involved in sustaining progress.

5. Behavioral Goal Setting

Setting behavioral performance goals is one of the most empirically supported cognitive approaches to

motivation within motivational research. Goal setting creates focused attention on tasks, forms intensity in achievement, and facilitates persistence in development. Sustaining coached behaviors after an engagement can be encouraged by setting SMART goals and having the coaches and their manager review behavioral goals as part of performance reviews. Goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant to the job, and time-bound.

There are several different approaches a coaching client can take to ensure that the results achieved from coaching are sustained over the long term. Our research¹ suggests that the most effective methods include the use of internal stakeholders to serve in the role of sponsor and/or mentor; ongoing behavioral goal setting; peer coaching; personal journaling; and coach spot-checks.

ABOUT TLD GROUP

The Leadership Development Group (TLD Group) is a global health industry talent development consultancy. We develop leaders to take on the myriad challenges facing the industry to position their organizations and the industry as a whole for success. Our targeted solutions are designed to engage and empower leaders from within, between, and across the health ecosystem – and include coaching, consulting, leadership academies, and our speaker’s bureau. Our worldwide faculty of over 400 organizational development practitioners, academicians, coaches, and consultants with deep expertise across the health industry, enables us to offer targeted insights and deliver highly impactful results.

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² Kilburg, R. R., Stokes, E. J., & Kuruvilla, C. (1998). Toward a conceptual model of organizational regression. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 50(2), 101-119. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1061-4087.50.2.101>

³ Brotman, L. E., Liberi, W. P., & Wasylyshyn, K. M. (1998). Executive coaching: The need for standards of competence. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice & Research*. 50(1) 40-46.

⁴Wasylyshyn, K. M. (2003). Executive coaching: An outcome study. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice & Research*. 55(2) 94-106.

⁵ Elliot, A. J., & Church, M. A. (1997). A hierarchical model of approach and avoidance achievement motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(1), 218–232. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.hofstra.edu/10.1037/0022-3514.72.1.218>

⁶ Gollwitzer, P. M. (2018). The goal concept: A helpful tool for theory development and testing in motivation science. *Motivation Science*, 4(3), 185–205. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.hofstra.edu/10.1037/mot0000115>

⁷ Kiel, F., Rimmer, E., Williams, K., & Doyle, M. (1996). Coaching at the top. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice & Research*. 48(2) 67-77.

⁸ Kilburg, R. R. (2001). Facilitating intervention adherence in executive coaching: A model and methods. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice & Research*. 53(4) 251-267.

⁹ Maurer, T. J., Solamon, J. M., Andrews, K. D., & Troxtel, D. D. (2001). Interviewee coaching, preparation strategies, and response strategies in relation to performance in situational employment interviews: An extension of Maurer, Solamon, and Troxtel (1998). *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 86(4) 709-717