

Executive Coaching: The Insiders' View of the Value of Coaching Part II

Organizations are increasingly turning to executive coaching to enhance the performance of their current leaders – and their future, high-potential leaders. In fact, a [recent survey](#) shows that more than half of all human resources and other corporate executives expect executive coaching to grow in 2011.

What is driving this? And what do executives who have either experienced coaching firsthand or are advocates for executive coaching really think about how, why and when coaching is most effective? We recently spoke to several senior level executives, including CEOs, CIOs and CHROs, about the topic. Their insights follow in Part II of this two-part Q&A.

[Click here](#) to read the previously-published Part I, addressing questions such as “What led you to coaching?” “What benefits have you seen so far?” and “How do you integrate leadership development into your overall corporate development programs?”

Meet the executives we interviewed for this article...

Marcus Berto

SVP for [Bucyrus International](#) in the Southern Hemisphere and based in Brazil. Bucyrus International, Inc. is a world leader in the design and manufacture of high productivity mining equipment for surface and underground mining. The company has numerous locations around the world and is headquartered in South Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Darrah Bixler

Vice President of Human Resources at [Accretive Solutions](#), a national consulting and executive search firm that delivers business solutions to help companies manage and improve their financial, operational and IT performance.

Greg Nickele

CEO of [Martin-Brower](#), the world's largest distributor of products to the world's largest restaurant company - McDonald's.

David K. (Duke) Reyes

Chief Executive Officer, [Reyes Beverage Group](#) and an owner and active partner in all Reyes Holdings LLC operations. He is a member of the Washington DC bar holding a Juris Doctorate degree from Georgetown University Law Center and a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Villanova University. Reyes Holdings L.L.C., the 20th largest private company in the United States with sales in excess of twelve billion dollars, is an international leader in the distribution of high quality beverage and food products. As one of McDonald's largest distributors worldwide, the largest beer distributor in the United States and one of Burger King and Subway's largest US distributors, the company employs 11,000 people and distributes over 400 million cases of product annually with operations in the US, Canada, Puerto Rico, Ireland, Central America and South America.



Mary Herrmann
Managing Director,
Executive Coaching
BPI group

Meet the executives we interviewed for this article (continued)...

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Yvonne Scott

Chief Information Officer for [Crowe Horwath LLP](#), one of the largest public accounting and consulting firms in the United States. Under its core purpose of Building Value with Values®, Crowe assists public and private company clients in reaching their goals through audit, tax, advisory, risk and performance services.

David Small

Vice President of Global Talent and The Leadership Institute, [McDonald's Corporation](#), home of the Golden Arches. More information about McDonald's can be found on www.mcdonalds.com.

Maury Tognarelli

President and CEO of [Heitman](#), a multi-national real estate investment management firm with approximately \$22 billion in assets under management.

Sheri Walters

Senior Manager, Human Resources, at [Tellabs Inc.](#) Tellabs supports communications service providers with mobile, optical and business solutions. Through advanced research and development centers, sales and service offices and strategic business partners located throughout the world, Tellabs helps service providers get ahead by adding revenue, reducing expenses and optimizing networks.

Is there a point when one is “done” with coaching? In other words, do you get to a point where you do not need it anymore?

Berto: This is the third time I have sought coaching. The first two times were at the beginning of my career. If I could, I would like to go through the process every year – that’s how much I enjoy the process and value it for the constant improvement it provides.

Bixler: Never – the answer is no. Coaching is a continuum. You may be finished with formal meetings with a coach, but you always need to continue to seek feedback to further refine your behavior and your performance.

Nickele: The reality is that we all have to try to get better today for tomorrow. I think you can always benefit from coaching as it forces you to periodically consider what you need to start, stop or continue. It challenges you to lay out your game plan and then execute against it. We have also built coaching into our culture so we now define it more broadly and as an on-going process, as opposed to a limited engagement with a single coach.

Reyes: Perhaps when you retire!

Scott: I don’t think anyone ever stops learning or gaining benefits from coaching. You can manage without coaching, but you may not be as effective. All of us tend to fall back into old habits pretty quickly, so checking in with one’s coach – even once the engagement is officially over – is very useful. Also, situations and people change. The downturn, for example, has stretched people in very different ways, and we have all dealt with new challenges. Many have had to communicate difficult news to employees and make tough decisions. A good coach can help you prepare for that.

Tognarelli: It’s really more about accepting a process of introspection that means you, as an individual, are constantly developing yourself as a person. That does not necessarily mean you need to engage a coach 100 percent of the time. However, sometimes you do need a third party in the form of a coach to work with you to fine-tune your development, to crystallize ideas for you and to help you see how others see you. The formal process is invaluable in this regard.

Walters: I believe coaching is an on-going process. An individual might benefit from a formal program for some time. Then, later in life, as an individual transitions to another point in their career, new coaching sessions can help hone new skills. We can all use coaching to gain new perspectives and skills at various times in our careers.

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- Scott

What are the perceptions of coaching in your organization?

So positive, in fact, that everyone now wants a coach!
- Small

Berto: I approached our CEO to ask whether I could do it and he encouraged me to move forward when I explained the reasons why. He also offered his support in interpreting the reports. I did not encounter any negativity at all.

Bixler: Very favorable as many of our people have come from consulting environments and know and appreciate what good coaching can do.

Reyes: I think it is viewed positively especially by those who now have greater self-awareness and who understand better how others perceive them.

Small: Right now, the perceptions are quite positive. So positive, in fact, that everyone now wants a coach! A lot of this is due to the positive perceptions of those who have been well-coached and the impact coaching has had on some of our high potentials through our accelerated programs over the last 6-7 years. This has driven us to message greater clarity around when to use a coach and the need to set up clear and specific parameters around the engagement. Any requests for coaching are channeled through my team and our HR Leads so that we operate under the same principles, contracts, etc. around the world.

Tognarelli: Positive. Like some others, I admit to being somewhat skeptical about coaching. But, having gone through it, I now have a very positive perception. The way I think about it, working with our coach has given me invaluable feedback. It has helped me to walk in others' shoes, and you need that perspective as a leader. Suppose, for instance, you fly in a private jet, are picked up by a private car and stay in the finest hotels. There is no way that you will know what stress your employees are enduring as a result of normal travel. As a leader, I need to know and understand the world my people work within. A good coach will disarm others and give them a sense of comfort in sharing feedback and then has the skill to help you understand how to employ that feedback to do an even better job leading others.

Walters: Tellabs employees participating in the coaching have embraced it. The participants are using feedback from the individual interviews to create their overall personal development plans and sharpen skills that will help them advance in their careers.

Have you ever been skeptical of coaching?

Berto: No – never. From my first meeting with Mary Herrmann, I found her transparent and objective – and I truly believe that the success of coaching hinges on the person’s transparency and openness. The only thing I would change, if I could, would be to devote more time to coaching, which is tough given the amount of travel I do.

Bixler: To some extent, I’ve been skeptical when I have not been involved in outlining the coaching engagement. I am always skeptical when coaching is proposed as a solution to a problem that needs to be “fixed.” It needs to be set up properly, and you must invest in high-performing individuals. Coaching cannot fix poor performers.

Reyes: Sure, I was skeptical prior to really understanding the process. Yet, the more I understood, the more comfortable I became with the process and could see the value it brings to our company.

Small: Oh, yes! There are a lot of people out there calling themselves coaches who do not have a clue about coaching for business results or business in general, for that matter. It seems like many so-called “life coaches” have drifted into the executive coaching arena. So, part of what we are doing at McDonald’s is “qualifying” a cadre of external coaches and educating officers and HR leaders while putting some controls around it.

Walters: Yes. Years ago, the format and methodology was very different than today. There was a perception, at times, that someone was in the penalty box and coaching was the “fix” for that person. As an HR professional, I knew that this approach would not, in the majority of times, ever work. We’ve totally changed the game and the perception of coaching today. Now, the coaching is a positive reinforcement tool to help individuals grow in their careers and develop skills for success.

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- Berto

Looking back to when you first started using coaching in your organization, what has been the most valuable for you and/or the company?

Good coaching should help you understand and articulate your strengths and weaknesses.
- Reyes

Berto: Mary Herrmann has been the single most important aspect of my coaching. She is very good at identifying strengths and weaknesses, ways to improve and ways to make changes. I also found the assessments and the 360 degree reviews very insightful. The advantage for my company is that they now know me better and can figure out what roles I may be able to play in the future.

Reyes: Good coaching should help you understand and articulate your strengths and weaknesses. That is sometimes tough, but it does get you closer to the truth and makes you better at what you do.

Tognarelli: We started coaching several years ago, right about the time the economic correction began. It coincided with our investment to build a more strategic HR team. We made a decision to hire people with consulting backgrounds in HR. We did so believing they would have a better appreciation of the nature of the professionals within the firm. It's been a good fit for us as the HR team shares many attributes of our most successful investment managers, which has made them respected business partners. And that has laid the groundwork for the type of business-focused coaching we wanted to have here at Heitman.

Walters: I always look at all of our development programs and evaluate them on the basis of what's best for the business and how many employees a program will touch. With Mary and her team, we started with a broader program for employee career improvement and then realized that coaching would complement it very well, particularly for our high-potential employees.

What has been your experience with Mary Herrmann, Managing Director of Executive Coaching at BPI group?

Berto: The experience has been wonderful. If I did it all over again, I would once again do it with Mary.

Bixler: Simply put, Mary “gets” it. She is down-to-earth, has conversations with her clients and doesn’t treat them in a formal manner even though she follows a formal process in her coaching. She doesn’t pretend to be an oracle. Instead, she makes people feel comfortable, has a superior capability to understand them and the situations they face, and helps them solve their own challenges. People are coached without realizing it.

Reyes: Mary does a great job. She can deliver tough messages to people in a constructive way, and that makes her effective. Her balance and judgment enable her to help her clients become more effective leaders.

Scott: I consider Mary Herrmann to be among the top five people that have had a positive impact on my career. Even though we are not in a formal coaching relationship right now, we developed a relationship in which I know that if I need her, I can call on her.

Tognarelli: Her strengths include her ability to work with many different personality types. She quickly establishes a comfort level with her clients, which makes her very effective. She has a good nature, which is disarming and important when working with C-Suite executives who may not be comfortable with receiving direct feedback.

Walters: Mary is incredibly genuine, and that’s what has made her so successful. She has a knack for tailoring her coaching and messages to her clients, so her coaching is well-received and participants act on her feedback. She can also be blunt, direct and straight-to-the-point when she needs to be. Mary does this well by tying her methodology to the business drivers and strategy of the organization. In short, her strong business acumen gives her great credibility.

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