"*Developmental coaching* helps coachees think through comparative tradeoffs associated with competing career options, to prepare for broader leadership roles via promotion, expanded job scope, or rapid growth. In Lee's case, I served as a leadership developer and career planner."

Evidence-Based Coaching

A Case Study

By Laura Hauser

Successful executive coaching facilitates growth, positive change, and improved performance. As the coaching field explodes, many OD practitioners hang an executive coaching shingle to capitalize on this trend. Yet executive coaching lacks the standards, research, and metrics to ensure efficacy. Executive coaches need evidence-based practices (Stober, Wildflower & Drake, 2006) to demonstrate not only skill and knowledge but also effectiveness.

This case study recaps an executive coaching engagement with a U.S. middle manager as an exemplar linking theory, research, practice, and results. The coaching engagement follows a four-phase, evidence-based process rooted in the Gestalt OSD (Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Organization and Systems Development Center, 2005) *unit of work*, Schein's (1999) process consultation, Peterson's (2006) five necessary conditions for change, and Block's (1981) flawless consultation process.

Lee: Case History and Contracting

"Acme" hired me in 2000 as an external consultant to guide an organization change project. Over the years, the executive team, their staff, and I had built solid trust and mutual respect. In May 2007, one of the executive team members referred "Lee" to me for coaching services to craft his next career step within Acme.

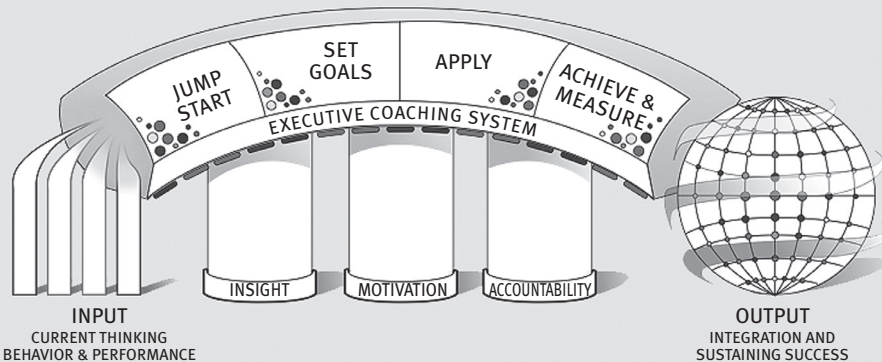Lee had worked on the same global change initiative as an internal staff consultant for 7 years. As this project moved to maintenance mode, Lee wanted coaching to define a new role in the organization for himself, continue to learn and grow as a leader, move toward a VP position, and prepare financially for a comfortable retirement in 8 to 15 years. His manager, the EVP Shared Services, and the CFO (to whom Lee had dotted-line responsibility), supported his request for coaching and welcomed his ideas for his next career role.

Listening closely to the type of coaching Lee requested, I determined my role as developmental rather than transitional or remedial (Barner, 2005). *Developmental coaching* helps coachees think through comparative tradeoffs associated with competing career options, to prepare for broader leadership roles via promotion, expanded job scope, or rapid growth. In Lee's case, I served as a leadership developer and career planner. This role contrasts with *transitional coaching*, wherein the coach serves as ethnographer and organizational translator (Bentz, 1998), and *remedial coaching*, where the coach plays devil's advocate to resolve performance problems.

Lee expressed urgency to formulate a written plan by August, discuss it with his manager, and make a job change in October. Although my coaching engagements typically last 6 months or longer, we agreed on a 3-month process and deliverables to meet Lee's timeframe. During our contracting conversation, Lee realized he needed more data to craft a career progression satisfying to him and valuable to the organization. We reframed

BRIDGE TO SUCCESS

Figure 1

JUMP START — SET GOALS — APPLY — ACHIEVE & MEASURE

EXECUTIVE COACHING SYSTEM

INSIGHT | MOTIVATION | ACCOUNTABILITY

INPUT
CURRENT THINKING
BEHAVIOR & PERFORMANCE

OUTPUT
INTEGRATION AND
SUSTAINING SUCCESS

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the coaching goal from "formulation of a written plan" to "increased clarity about Lee's strengths and career aspirations to better enable him to formulate a career plan as a valued leader at Acme." Lee was highly motivated.

We agreed on gathering data through multiple sources, to improve Lee's self-awareness and informed choices about his future, with these 3-month deliverables:

» Conduct an intake interview autobiography (Barner, 2005).
» Review a recent internal 360° leadership development assessment.
» Administer *Career Anchors* (Schein, 2006), Team Dimensions Profile™ (Inscape Publishing, 2001), and Work Expectations Profile™ (1995).
» Interview Lee's manager about Lee's strengths and opportunities for advancement.
» Conduct four biweekly, 2-hour, face-to-face coaching sessions with Lee.
» Provide coaching support as needed via phone and email.

These deliverables draw on evidence-based coaching from humanist, developmental, adult development, and behavior-based perspectives, using an executive coaching system developed in my practice, which incorporates classic process consultation, behavior change, and intervention methods.

"Bridge to Success": An Executive Coaching System

The executive coaching system, using the metaphor the "Bridge to Success" (*Figure 1*), expands, strengthens, and optimizes the coachee's leadership capabilities, competencies, and confidence within organizational context. The system, grounded in Gestalt OSD's (Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Organization and

The coaching system moves the individual from current thinking, behaviors, and performance, to expanded thinking and enhanced performance, toward a more integrated self, sustainable development, and success.

Systems Development Center, 2005) unit of work, guides the coachee across the bridge through a four-phase process, asking powerful questions:

1. Jump Start: *"Where are you now?"*
2. Goal Setting: *"What do you want?"*
3. Real-World Application: *"What will you do to get what you want?"* and
4. Learning and Achievement Measurement: *"What have you learned and how have your goals been reached?"*

Three pillars simultaneously support these four phases: the coachee's

» **insight:** understanding of one's developmental needs;
» **motivation:** willingness to invest the time and energy required for needed self-development; and
» **accountability:** internal and external mechanisms monitoring change and providing meaningful consequences.

The strength or weakness of these pillars affects an individual's ability to change. For example, a person may want to gain insight and awareness to be more strategic, but may lack the motivation to learn and apply new behaviors that affect the ability to be more strategic. Thus, the three pillars provide crucial support throughout the coaching intervention.

Assuming the primary purpose of coaching is to change behavior, the executive coaching system adapts Peterson's (2006) five necessary conditions for change: insight, motivation, capabilities, real-world practice, and accountability. The coaching system moves the individual from current thinking, behaviors, and performance, to expanded thinking and enhanced performance, toward a more integrated self, sustainable development, and success. The case illustrates each phase of the coaching process, and identifies its classical roots at each phase (Block, 1981; Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Organization and Systems Development Center, 2005; Schein, 1999).

Jump Start:
Where are you now?

In the first phase, Jump Start, the coach helps heighten the coachee's awareness of his or her insights and motivations. Surveys and interviews gather others' perceptions about the coachee's strengths, and what it takes to be successful in the organization today and in the

future. The Insight and Motivation Grid (*Figure 2*), which incorporates elements of appreciative inquiry and the Johari window, guides my inquiry and coachees' syntheses of their new awareness of insights and motivations during the first phase of coaching.

This two-by-two grid provides a structured way to examine (first column) the coachee's current insights on how he or she is viewed by self and others, and (second column) what matters most to motivate the coachee and others in the organization. As a result, the coach and coachee better understand the coachee as viewed from multiple perspectives. This first phase of the process ties to Gestalt OSD's (Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Organization and Systems Development Center, 2005) assessing *what is*, ICF's (2008) core competency of *setting the foundation*; Schein's (1999) *defining the relationship* to determine the problem and establish the psychological contract; and, similarly, Block's (1981) *defining the initial problem*, as stated by the coachee and explored together for underlying causes.

During this first phase, I used the grid with Lee to guide data gathering. I quickly learned about Lee's work history and work/life values, drawing on observations; his *Career Anchors* (Schein, 2006) profile, Team Dimensions Profile™ (Inscape Publishing, 2001), and Work Expectations Profile™ (1995) assessments; our intake interview; an interview with Lee's manager; and Lee's prior-year 360°-feedback report. Together, Lee and I uncovered his history, values, and key behavioral motivators. We gained insight into his career path decisions, factors that impacted his job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and the types of leadership roles and settings that play to his strengths.

A small-town Midwesterner, Lee was White, mid-40s, married, with two teenagers. In his first job, with one of the lead CPA firms, he liked working close to home, but didn't like being an auditor, viewed as "the enemy," or working long hours, "like the company owned my life."

Next Lee took a job closer to his girlfriend in Chicago, with a major food company, an industry he viewed as stable

Figure 2: I.A.M. Grid (Insight & Motivation Grid)

	Insights	Motivations
Viewed by Self	ABILITIES How you see yourself	GOALS AND VALUES How you see yourself
Viewed by Others	PERCEPTIONS How others see you	SUCCESS FACTORS What matters to others

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and secure. He learned, "You'll never please everyone, but so long as I have been fair, I can sleep at night." They soon married and moved to California, where she had a job opportunity. He joined a small company as controller and office manager. He enjoyed learning about managing the entire company, but was soon bored.

Then Lee accepted a finance position with Acme, a top-tier multinational where he felt he could grow. His current director role required delivering the $160 million operating budget for a 7-year change project and transitioning the division from local to global shared services. As a result of the *Career Anchors* (Schein, 2006) interview, Lee learned that flexibility and networking were as or more important than actual performance. He enjoyed working collaboratively with people, especially peers; a comfortable work environment and his own space; balance of work and family time; and a sense of accomplishment. He believed that he excelled in creating and executing management's vision, influencing his peers, running a project from beginning to end, and exceeding expectations.

The learning instruments results increased Lee's self-awareness. The Work Expectations Profile™ (Inscape Publishing, 1995) provided a gap analysis about his current job. Lee rated autonomy, physical environment, and teamwork as highly important yet moderately unmet. The Team Dimensions Profile™ (2001) revealed Lee's strong preference for implementing ideas

and leanings toward communicating and advancing ideas. He gained satisfaction by delivering concrete results; seeking successful implementations; and paying attention to details, the bottom line, and relationships.

In interviewing Lee's manager, who is a highly successful, influential, and respected executive in the company, I also used the I.A.M.grid to help frame useful interview questions, which Lee then refined. This interview provided a perspective on organizational perceptions of Lee as a leader, what it takes to be successful at the VP level at Acme, and the fit between Lee and more demanding leadership roles in the company.

My intent in coaching Lee was humanistic, supporting his positive change toward a more fulfilled life. The assessments helped Lee gain clarity and awareness about his thoughts, feelings, sensations, and environment, as initial steps toward desired action. This coaching helped Lee shift from *subject* (unseen) to *object* (seen), to surface and examine hidden assumptions, consistent with adult and constructive developmental theory (Berger, 2006; Kegan, 1994). Reviewing the various assessment results, we focused on Lee's interpretation and meaning making with the results, which significantly increased his self-awareness, understanding of how others saw him, and focus on work/life balance. This prepared him for the second phase of the executive coaching system, *goal setting*.

Goal Setting:
What do you want?

"Diagnosis and intervention are one and the same process" (Schein, 1999, p. 241). In the goal-setting phase, coach and coachee co-create the relationship (ICF, 2008), set scope and objectives (Block, 1981), choose what to attend to (Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Organization and Systems Development Center, 2005), and flesh out the psychological contract (Schein, 1999). Based on the assessment findings, goal setting develops desired future outcomes that align personal and professional goals.

Lee discovered that he least enjoyed and wanted to avoid "long hours, working for a boss who doesn't appreciate what I do, and working with peers who undermine me." He wanted more time for himself and relaxation time with his family. At the same time he envisioned a role in the organization as a recognized, core member of the finance leadership team and a promotion to a VP position to fulfill his plan toward an early, comfortable retirement.

Assessing potential obstacles, Lee faced a dilemma. He felt that senior leaders' perception of him as a staff person might impede his candidacy for a VP role. He typically did not work long hours, even when requested, despite VP-level norms of long hours and extensive travel. Lee's top career anchor (Schein, 2006) was lifestyle, followed by security/stability. Regardless of coachee goals, successful outcomes more often result from goals congruent with the coachee's values and interests (Grant, 2006). This became evident through Lee's insight about the dilemma between his values of stability and security compared to the organization's value *to do whatever it takes*, which subordinated work/family balance.

Further incongruity surfaced from Lee's high expectation—but moderately low fulfillment—of recognition, which gave him pause. When I asked, "What's going on inside of you at this moment?" Lee shared his belief that "self-promotion is bad and being humble is good." Accordingly, he had difficulty throughout his career selling his value to the organization. I helped Lee shift his thinking from self-promotion to reciprocity, "joining our strengths," which helped Lee articulate confidently how he brings value to people and the business.

Lee's insights gained during the Jump Start phase supported alignment of his personal and professional goals in the second, goal-setting phase. Rather than seeking a VP job, he decided to find and/or design a position in the company where he could add value to the organization by partnering with a visionary leader. Thus Lee could use his strengths to design plans, align people, and make the vision a reality. Making a key decision about any new role would hinge on the extent to which the environment would support his values of stability and security. Having gained clarity about his career goal, Lee was ready to take action.

Real-World Application:
What will you do to get you what you want?

Focusing on the coachee's plan of action, this third phase of the executive coaching system involves experimenting with new skills and behaviors. The coachee *moves on the choices* (Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Organization and Systems Development Center, 2005) by applying the action plan and putting into practice the knowledge gained through coaching. "The [coachee] owns the problem and the solution" (Schein, 1999, p. 243), gaining new insights along the way (Block, 1981).

One key action Lee took toward his career goal was to share the insights he gained during the coaching process to build support for his career goal. Prepping Lee for his talk with the CFO, I supported his movement to action by role-playing the conversation through his reframed lens from self-promotion to reciprocity. Lee emailed me after his meeting with the CFO:

> I was able to communicate to him [the CFO] the value that I bring to [Acme]. He prompted the conversation, having seen the future org chart, and thought that my role there looked light. He remembered that I was working on a proposal for my future because I felt I could do more, and asked my opinion about a role he was thinking of creating.... I let him know that I feel I add value by partnering with a leader who has a vision, where I create the plan and align the people to make the vision a reality. He said he was glad to know that, and looks forward to my proposal. Thank you so much for the work we did yesterday. It gave me the words to say to him in order to plant the seed to my future.

The coaching process helped Lee begin realistic appraisal of future roles, responsibilities, and values; expand his thinking about the tradeoffs involved in pursuing a VP role; and see the dilemma between his need for a balanced lifestyle and the organization's expectations of long hours in a demanding role. We had met our agreed coaching goals and deliverables. By mid-August it was time to move toward closing the coaching engagement, by reflecting on Lee's increased self-awareness and choices about his future.

Outcome Measurement:
What have you learned and how have your goals been reached?

In this fourth phase, coach and coachee

THE EXECUTIVE COACHING SYSTEM ASKS POWERFUL QUESTIONS

JUMP START: *Where are you now?*

GOAL SETTING: *What do you want?*

REAL-WORLD APPLICATION: *What will you do to get you what you want?*

OUTCOME MEASUREMENT: *What have you learned and how have your goals been reached?*

reflect on the coaching experience, evaluate learnings and their application, affirm leadership strengths, and determine how to leverage those strengths to expand the coachee's success. "The ending of a project should be viewed as a legitimate phase of the project and as another opportunity for learning" (Block, 1981, p. 193). Like closing out a unit of work (Gestalt Institute of Cleveland Organization and Systems Development Center, 2005), this final phase completes a cycle of awareness. Facilitating learning and tying results to the original coaching goal (ICF, 2008) serve as a reminder of the coachee's continuing developmental journey (Bacon & Spear, 2003).

We compared the original coaching goal with the actual accomplishments and reviewed the impact the coaching experience had on Lee. We also designed next steps that Lee could take to sustain his new awareness and move forward. To facilitate Lee's self-reflection and insight on next steps, I asked for feedback about his coaching experience. I focused on supporting Lee's new awareness and the potential dilemmas he might face between his values and Acme's, especially regarding security/stability. Through his expanded awareness and development, Lee confidently asserted that he was now better able to make choices about a new role for himself in Acme that adds value to the business while maintaining his work/life balance.

After the coaching engagement concluded, and curious about how the evidence-based executive coaching system had affected Lee, I asked him how the coaching experience facilitated his growth and positive change. I received the following email:

I am very grateful to [my manager] for his support in allowing me to work with [a coach] to better understand what is important to me, personally and professionally, and the direction I want to take in my future career. Through my coaching sessions and based on my results of the tools utilized, the data points lead to the same conclusions. It is clear to me

that I have a very strong preference for the team role of executor or implementer. I also have very high expectations for life style or work/life balance and stability/security.

Given these data points, I have a better understanding of how I add value at [Acme]… by partnering with a leader with new ideas and creating the plans to deliver the ideas, aligning people to the plans and executing.

I also understand that it is very important to me to add value in my personal life and keep my time at work in balance. This core value directs me toward positions and bosses that will allow me to do that. My previous career moves reflect this core value and I will continue to strive to maintain balance.

The feedback I received has helped me to understand how I am viewed… [by] my boss, my peers and my staff. I am seen as results driven, an expert in my area… [with] a calming effect on our team dynamics. I am also viewed as risk adverse, having a narrow focus of experience… and inflexible or needing new ideas. I am in agreement with this feedback. I am looking for ways to open myself to more risk, where appropriate, increase my span of finance experience and I am encouraging new ideas from my staff and my peers.

Based on my personal life, I will look for [suitable] positions… [and] better understand which individuals I would consider working for, which will give me the opportunity to continue to learn and expand my knowledge and allow me to balance my work and life.

Ideally, evaluation itself becomes a perpetual activity rather than a set of activities or a stage in a learning process (Schein, 1999). I phoned Lee 15 months later to follow up:

What new role/job did you craft?
My objective was to get back into a leadership role and be viewed as a

leader of finance in a way that would support my family and work balance. So a few months ago, I decided to take a role on the leadership team for the corporate finance group as director of headquarter cost management… [giving me] budget responsibility of $800 million with high visibility in the company.

How does this align with your work/life balance and job satisfaction?
I report to one of [CFO's] direct reports, who supports my values around work and family balance. It has worked out well. My boss is understanding from a family perspective. For example, both of my kids play varsity soccer… right after school. She has no problem with me leaving early to get to these games. As a tradeoff, my work/life balance has been a bit skewed, but mainly because it is budget season, I have a new learning curve, and I'm building my team; but I know it is temporary. Although I consistently leave work on time, I sometimes take work home with me, but it is the exception, not the rule. The difference is that I want to do this, not because I have to do this; I have a good attitude.

What stands out the most to you about how the coaching experience has affected your choices?
One of the biggest wins that you helped me with was practicing the words about how I add value to the organization. I remember the day you made me speak it to you as though you were the CFO. Then I had an immediate opportunity to say it to him, and the words rolled right off my tongue. This was part of the coaching that gave me confidence and helped me be comfortable with me being who I am. I'd like to tell you more but I've gotta run; its time to leave for my kids' soccer game! We can talk more later. Let's keep in touch!

Lee's self-report evidenced newfound confidence, self-awareness, satisfaction,

work/family balance, and values alignment that confirmed his growth, positive change, and improved performance, all founded on an evidence-based approach to executive coaching.

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