



A Sponsor's guide to coaching

GOOD PRACTICES GUIDE

Published by CFI
www.cfi.co.in

About CFI

Founded in 2006, CFI has been helping leaders navigate their way through their leadership challenges, empowering them to realize their true potential thereby contributing to long-lasting personal and organizational results. CFI has achieved this by building an integrated coaching institution offering training, coaching, continuing education, research and publication services.

CFI defines Coaching as a very personal, humanistic, result-oriented and one-to-one developmental relationship, structured through a formal engagement, between a motivated executive seeking help and a skilled and empathetic coach with formal coach education and organizational experience. CFI promotes a holistic approach to coaching that is coachee centric in spirit, humanistic by orientation, empowering by style and eclectic by design. It prepares its Coaches to be highly skillful in their coaching conversations and deeply mindful about the psychological dimensions of Coaching and to stay committed to the ethical framework. CFI's coaching efforts focus on bringing about change to manage problems and develop unused opportunities

With a community of over 210+ Certified CEO Coaches and the deep expertise gained from having handled over 650 paid coaching engagements for over 50 reputed client organizations, CFI is today the most preferred destination for potential Coaches and clients, and a trusted source of thought about Coaching. Headquartered in Chennai, India, CFI also has contributed to nurturing a coaching culture by training over 213 leaders as coaches, with two published books to the credit of its founders.

A vertical red bar on the left side of the page contains three stylized birds in flight. The top bird is red, the middle one is white, and the bottom one is white. They are all facing right.

About this guide

This guide is meant to help potential sponsors of executive coaching engagements play their role effectively and through that help their team member who is the coachee get the most out of the engagement. It is also meant to help them derive the most optimal return on their investment. Above all, this guide can help make sponsorship a rewarding experience.

The research and publication effort for this guide was led by Oscar Braganza. Oscar is a senior CFI coach with a large number of coaching engagements to his credit. During his long and successful corporate career, Oscar led several businesses and teams across sectors and geographies.

Oscar was ably supported in his efforts by Ganesh Chella who added perspectives from his personal experience on the role of a sponsor.

The research and editorial support for this project was provided by Vaishnavi who leads CFI's research efforts.



Sponsorship in Coaching

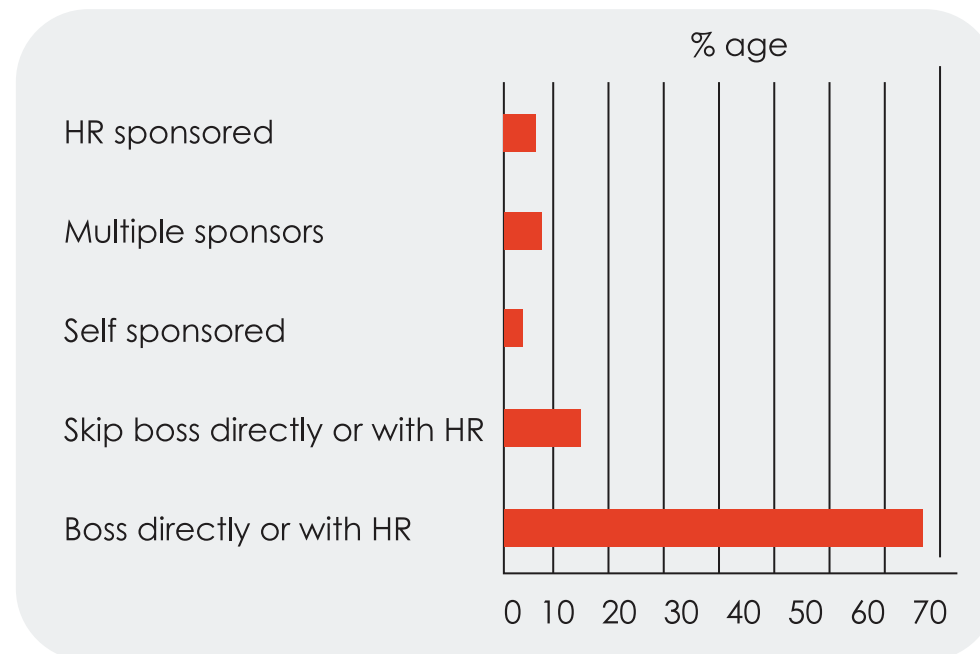
Executive coaching which is set within an organizational context is seen as a powerful leader development intervention and is being leveraged by more and more organizations for the benefit of their leaders and of course their own growth. While helping relationships in general are sought out and paid for by individuals who need help (like counseling and therapy) executive coaching almost always has a sponsor – someone who originates or backs the proposal, funds it, supports it and champions its effective use. Such a person is referred to as the sponsor in executive coaching. The sponsor is often seen as playing a role which is much larger than just providing financial support. The sponsor is often seen as deeply committed to the growth and development of the executive who is being considered for coaching

Who is typically the sponsor?

If you are a sponsor, it is most likely that you are the immediate boss of the coachee. You might either independently sponsor the engagement or do so jointly with HR. It is also possible that you might be the skip level manager, HR Leader or the promoter of the company where the coachee works. On a rare occasion (as of today) you might be your own sponsor.

In our experience, we have seen the following trends in the nature of sponsorship

Who is sponsoring coaching engagements



As more and more venture capital firms invest in entrepreneurs and their businesses, they see the need to support these entrepreneurs in their leadership journey. As their portfolio companies are poised for scale, they realize that coaching can make a difference between success and failure. Given this reality, we are beginning to see that partners of venture capital firms are beginning to act as sponsors of executive coaching engagements.

Typical outcome expectations

Depending on who you are, you might be expecting varying outcomes from the coaching engagement. These could be as follows

Skip level manager

While you as the skip level manager may have similar expectations from the engagement as the immediate manager, there are a few additional expectations you are likely to have. You may look at succession as one of the outcomes from the engagement. You might look at growth opportunities for the coachee beyond the present position. You may also look at this as one step towards the larger goal of a strong leadership pipeline.

On occasion, you may also see this as a way of improving the relationship between the coachee and his immediate manager.

Immediate manager

You may wish for your subordinate to develop the requisite leadership competencies which will make him a more effective and acceptable leader in his present team/organization. You are more likely to focus on the “here and now”, seeking to make the leader more effective in his current role. You may also see coaching as a means to make the employee more self-aware and accepting of feedback



HR leader

You might be playing either a facilitative or supportive role, while gently steering the engagement towards the organizational agenda of fostering development. As the HR head, you may also be role modeling the act of championing development for the immediate manager.

Owner manager

In addition to things that any manager would expect, as the owner, you might be seeing coaching as a way to accomplish your business growth strategy or as a means of getting the best out of the talent that you have or fulfilling your philosophy of growing leaders from within.

A sponsor's personal experience of having received coaching plays a big part in the success of the coaching engagement. While this is not mandatory, sponsors who have gone through coaching tend to be supportive, and show empathy.

Without a firsthand experience, sponsors tend to have a fuzzy idea of the process which may diminish commitment.

What's in it for the sponsor?

Why should a member of the board or a Managing Director or CEO or any other member of top management choose to sponsor an executive coaching engagement or put more broadly, why should any of them champion the development of one or more people below them. While it might appear obvious, it is often useful to answer the obvious at times.

1. Given that the success of the business is so tightly intertwined with the competence of its leaders, investment in leader development is no longer the exclusive remit of the learning and development function. Business leaders at the highest levels including the board and investors are charged with the task of determining how leaders will be groomed, developed and made effective. So, being a sponsor in many ways is a responsibility.
2. It would be fair to say that among all the developmental experiences; executive coaching calls for the highest level of involvement of the immediate manager or sponsor. In the pages that follow, you will notice that sponsoring a coaching engagement calls for very close collaboration with the coach and the coachee.

- 
3. Playing the role of a sponsor is also a hugely educative experience. While managers are always told that they should take care of the development of their team members, they are seldom taught how they can do it or given the opportunity to do it first-hand. Unlike sponsoring someone for a course, coaching calls for a lot of emotional investment and close interactions. At the end of an engagement, the sponsor learns a lot too, almost as much as the coachee, especially about development, change and human behaviour.
 4. The relationship between managers (sponsors) and team members (coachees) is not always uniform and at the same level of functionality. Some enjoy a trust-based relationship, some enjoy a working relationship and some may unfortunately be in a dysfunctional relationship. The process of engaging in a developmental alliance in the role of a sponsor holds the potential to push the relationship one notch up. It offers the opportunity for the sponsor to positively influence the growth of the coachee and use the space to positively channelize his legitimate developmental expectations from the coachee.

What is your role in the coaching engagement?

Needless to say, as a sponsor you have an invaluable role to play in a coaching engagement. This role may be categorized under the following areas:



You will notice that these are also in sequence and represent the key touch points in an engagement.



1. Setting the context for the coaching engagement

It is your role as a sponsor to provide the organization context and share the organizational expectations with the coach at the start of the engagement. You must take the initiative to secure three-way alignment in a very candid and open discussion with the coach and coachee. In fact, the first formal meeting in the engagement is the three-way meeting between the coach, coachee and you the sponsor.

It is your choice whether you wish to invite the HR Leader to be a part of this meeting or not. This three-way meeting sets the tone for the entire engagement.

TIPS:

- As a first step, you must be sure that coaching is the appropriate intervention for the individual. Don't use coaching as the last resort before asking a person to leave or a PIP tool. Don't use coaching when the need is clearly training. Don't also use coaching when there are other organisational constraints to performance.
- Make clear to the coachee why he has been chosen for coaching and educate him or her that it is a badge of honour and not a remedial step.
- Maintain consistent and clear communication within the company about who gets coaching and why. Clear positioning is critical for its acceptance. Lack of communication can lead to speculation and misconception or even loose talk and shake the foundation of the coaching engagement and the evolution of a coaching culture in the organization
- Be honest with the coach on what the ground realities are and what expectations you have.
- Explain the business context, and the role of the coachee in realising the business strategy and goals, and the challenges for the coachee in playing the desired role (current/ future or a transition) in the three-way meeting.
- Of course, it is quite natural for the sponsor to choose to share some feedback about the coachee offline in the interest of being sensitive.

2. Confirming the coaching goals

After the coach has worked with the coachee to understand him and his story and needs and, has gathered adequate inputs from multiple sources to validate the needs and help him shape his coaching goals, it is times to meet the sponsor once again and share with him the specific coaching goals that have been arrived at.

The sponsor may either agree with the goals or offer some suggestions to make it more specific or concrete. Adding contextual insight to the goal, is an aspect where the sponsor can be of immense value.

TIPS:

- Be realistic in terms of your change expectations - what coaching can or can't do.
- As far as possible, stay with your original expectations and avoid adding new elements which can lead to derailment.
- There must be congruence between the coaching agenda as envisaged by the sponsor and the coachee. In case there is divergence of view, the sponsor along with the coach must play a leading role in creating this alignment
- Once the goal is set, you can provide great insight to sharpen the goals, see whether they are realistic, create the right environment for the goals to take shape, and provide the opportunity for the coachee to demonstrate and practice the newly formed strategies and action plans
- Use the meeting more to understand how you can support its implementation.

3. Review progress

Once the goals are signed off, the coach starts working with the coachee to implement them.

It is useful for the sponsor to periodically check with the coachee about his progress in implementing the goals and also exploring what support he might need in this regard. It is also appropriate for the sponsor to have a brief three-way catch up chat with the coach and coachee to enquire about progress or even share some observations and visible efforts. Most importantly, it is important to be available to the coach as well as the coachee as and when they ask for it.

TIPS:

- Be available for review meetings as per agreed frequency
- Give objective feedback to the coach regarding the coachee, during meetings



4. Supporting and facilitating implementation

For the coachee to make any significant change in his style or behaviour, he will need the support of his manager. He may need resources, he may need his understanding, he may need his encouragement or even his approval. Any change is likely to lead to momentary drops in performance and the sponsor needs to be sensitive to this. For example, if someone is learning to get better at empowering his subordinates, he may swing to the other end for a while before finding his rightful balance.

TIPS:

- Remain sensitive to the process of change
- Support with additional ideas for change and effective implementation



5. Raising the bar

As the sponsor you may realize that the changes made until a point are good but not good enough. You may find that the coachee can do more to make the change more transformational. You may find that as the sponsor you have a lot of visibility into things he can do more of.

Use available opportunities to raise the bar as far as change is concerned. Don't position them as deficiency in the coaching engagement but as your efforts to raise the bar further for transformational changes.

It is fine to encourage the coachee (and coach) to aim higher, to make transformational changes

6. Monitoring progress and giving feedback

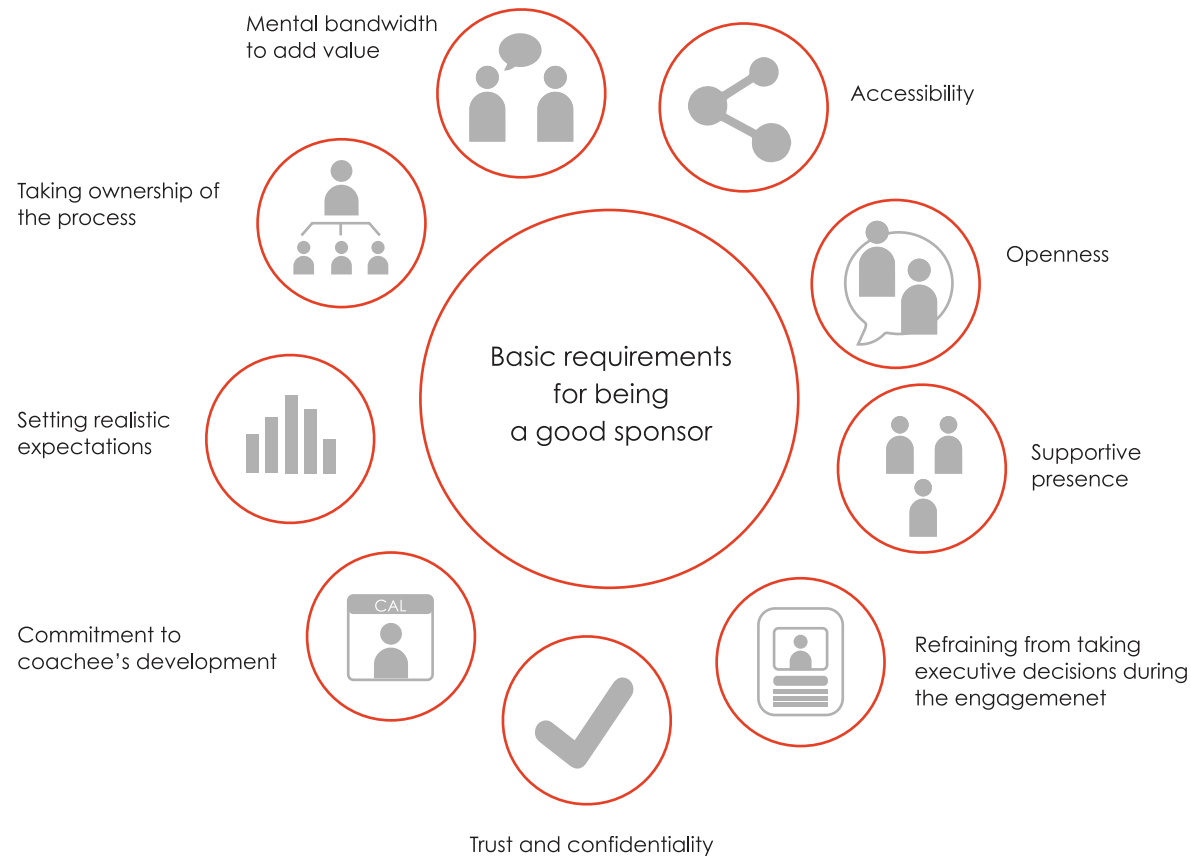
The coach will want to know from you, your impressions about the extent of change. He may do this in one of his informal catch-up sessions with you or as part of his dipstick surveys. Do use this opportunity to point out every small evidence of change observed by you. This appreciation can be tremendously motivating to the coachee.

TIPS:

- Consciously look out for efforts being made and changes evident, even if they are small, in the coachee and offer encouraging feedback
- Provide feedback on the coaching process, particularly if there is a perceived danger of derailment. This will help the coach course correct.
- You should observe the coachee carefully under various organizational contexts /meetings /projects and can also consider giving new projects and assignments suggested by the coach as a part of the development process during coaching. This may also include taking the coachee out of the current team [temporarily] and observe him under different settings/contexts

Critical attributes

Against the backdrop of the role of the sponsor and the areas outlined, here are things that when paid attention to by the sponsor contribute to the success of the engagement. In other words, these are some of the typical attributes of a sponsor who is playing his role well.



Mental bandwidth to add value: Making the time and mind space to make a difference

Taking ownership of the process: Not having to be chased by HR but being proactive

Setting realistic expectations: Knowing what can be achieved and not stacking up all the baggage of the past

Commitment to coachee's development: Using the space as a vehicle to display your commitment for the coachee's development

Trust and confidentiality: Viewing the coaching space as a safe space and respecting the boundaries of confidentiality

Refraining from taking executive decisions: Avoiding taking decisions about the coachee during the process which will impair development

Supportive presence: Displaying empathy and understanding

Openness: Sharing expectations and feedback

Accessibility: Being available to the coach when needed

How does one evaluate the effectiveness of the engagement?

As a sponsor you must know that the following methods are used to evaluate the effectiveness of a coaching engagement

Dipstick

An informal dipstick feedback among a few observers (internal and external) at various levels and various contexts can help in gauging the effectiveness of the engagement.

Opening 360° feedback

This helps refine the goals and agenda of the engagement. A few of the respondents can be useful touch points for the coachee to enlist, and seek periodic feedback about how they perceive his progress.




Closing 360° feedback

If done with rigor, a closing 360° is a great input for assessing how far the coachee has progressed. The sponsor's feedback must be taken in the greatest of detail. If the sponsor is a skip level boss, the line boss should also be interviewed in detail. All other respondents who were part of the opening 360o, must be interviewed too.

Self-report

The coachee's own report of the changes that she/he has experienced after coaching is a very important tool for assessing the effectiveness of the engagement



While these methods are used by the coach, the most important method that the sponsor can employ to evaluate the effectiveness of a coaching engagement is by observing the coachee closely during the course of working together. Depending on the goal, the sponsor can see the change visibly, if it's a demonstrable behavior change. The Sponsor and/or the line manager have the line-of-sight visibility to the coachee. They can be the eyes and ears to bring in an objective assessment at the various touch-points. Additionally, discreetly assessing the views of the others in the eco-system on the extent to which the coachee is engaging in the new behaviors agreed or seeking a one on one conversation with the coachee and getting insight into her/his progress can also help.

“Do not outsource the overall development of the coachee to the Coach. There is an individual and there is the system. The Sponsor must be able to think through what happens after the coaching is complete in terms of supporting the sustenance of the change as well as other aspects of the coachee's development as coaching is ONE input. There are other areas of domain, skill, knowledge that have to be added so that there is all round development for a specific role or level”
- V J Rao, CFI Coach.