Economic Darwinism is putting significant pressure on the use of executive coaching today. Leaders tell us they face more complexity and greater pressure, with less time and resources. The antidote? Take the coaching process to the next level, delivering more value within a tighter budget. Conceived in the midst of the economic downturn, the What Really Works executive coaching process focuses on how to get the biggest benefit from coaching – for the personal and professional benefit of the leader and for broader impact across the organization. The story of Adrienna, a private company president, illustrates how coaching really works.
What Does the Next Level Look Like for Me?

Over the past 50 years, research has been consistent about how to accelerate leadership performance to the next level: coaching applied during stretch experiences. That’s why executive coaches exist.

But many leaders still wince at the mention of executive coaching. An uninformed stigma evokes defense mechanisms, like:

“What’s wrong with me?”
“I hate the soft stuff.”
“I don’t need to be fixed.”

This bright paper illuminates the positive value coaching provides to help good leaders get better results. It demonstrates how a fresh approach helps overcome the inertia of today’s tight budgets and schedules. In short, effective coaching today goes way beyond “fixing” people. It focuses on helping leaders do more with less and get to the next level.

The highest impact coaching begins by exploring and answering the question: *What does the next level look like for me?*

An Example

For one leader, Adrienna, the next level came into view when she was hired to run the commercial entity of a very successful startup. Uprooting her family and moving several time zones away, she assumed the role of President, riding in on a wave of confidence. A lifelong straight-A student, Adrienna was 42 and she had consistently been promoted every three years since finishing her MBA at age 26. Why should she expect anything but success in this new endeavor?

The move and her new job were significant stretches. Her finances were reasonably sound because she always managed her money carefully, but most of her stock options had yet to mature and now her husband was a stay-at-home dad. She worried about her 12- and 14-year-old daughters integrating into new schools. Questions lingered: How would the family handle living on only her income? Could her husband handle the drama of two high school girls? Would she be able to find time for personal priorities like fitness and finding new friends?

Within 30 days, reality began to unfold at work. The honeymoon wore off when she discovered the goals and budgets had little basis in financial reality and the talent was B-grade at best. In her last job, there were mature systems and processes in place. Even though this business was just short of $70 million, job descriptions were...
sketchy and only senior managers had goals. Last year was the first year of formal performance reviews and somehow 78% of the people reviewed were rated “exceeds expectations” on their performance reviews.

*How could that be possible?* she wondered.

Adrienna requested a 100-day check-in with her boss, the thirty-something founder and CEO. She prepared an impressive PowerPoint to ask for short-term capital to make important changes. Before she could get to the end of her presentation about changes in product development, marketing and distribution, he stopped her: *“We don’t have money lying around here to just throw at this business! New customers and profits have been harder to come by as we grow – that’s why we hired you!”* he laughed. *“You said you were ready for the big job. Go make the staff changes you need so you can find the money to get the business on track.”*

Meeting over.

Adrienna was shocked. The conversation knocked her off track. She found herself yearning for her old job. She missed her friends, particularly the CFO who always helped her get what she wanted.

This was a be-careful-what-you-wish-for chapter in her autobiography called: *The Next Level.*

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The Next Level

Celebrating

Blending Strengths

Working Together

↓ PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

Going it Alone

Problem Hunting

Finger Pointing

Downward Spiral
Coaching: A Strategy to Help Winners Win at the Next Level.

The purpose of executive coaching is to help good leaders get better results so they can succeed at the next level. The breakthrough comes when leaders realize: seldom in life is anything significant accomplished alone. Just as world-class athletes seek out the best coaching, executive coaches help elevate leadership performance to the next level.

That’s why Adrienna was a perfect candidate for coaching. She needed help to get through the shock of the new role and the move to a new city. She needed to get her personal and professional life aligned and she needed to engage her team to get the business to the next level.

What does it take to “step up” today?
Adrienna’s story is not unique. Whether stepping up to lead a chaotic startup or looking to sustain momentum in a stagnating market, leaders face big challenges today.

We’re all working longer and harder than we expected, society is changing very quickly and it’s easy to become overwhelmed. Finding new customers and healthy profits is difficult. We have four generations in the workforce, each with a different idea of what it means to “work.” The face of our employees, customers and business partners is changing and many of us are not feeling equipped to embrace a culture that’s blending right in front of our eyes. Across the political, community and family spectrum, we’re more polarized, isolated and concerned for the future.

At the same time, work/life balance is becoming more elusive. The lines are blurring as more people work from home and are “on call” 24/7 via their smartphones. The meaning of “working together” is morphing, as remote teams communicate and collaborate via technology – often across continents, time zones and languages. For all these reasons, coaching is more necessary than ever, in both large and small companies.


Courage, creativity and the freedom to explore new things are accelerated within a structured coaching process. The Good Leadership Enterprises coaching involves five specific phases:

1. Aspiration and Personal Leadership
2. Insights
3. Observations
4. Planning and Goal Setting
5. Step Up Challenges

A New Approach for the “Do More With Less” Environment

Corporate budgets for developing leaders have been cut in half over the past ten years in the United States. That’s partly because many of the middle- and upper-mid-level leaders were cast off into the small business world through layoffs. Those left behind became accustomed to doing more with less. It’s no longer a cliché; it is business reality.

These pullbacks have created a wave of Economic Darwinism sweeping through the coaching industry. Smaller companies and corporate buyers alike are demanding:

• Better pricing, greater process efficiency
• Increased intensity over shorter time frames
• Value for both the personal and professional needs of the leader
• Wider impact across the organization, addressing the most critical needs of the business
The First Step: Personal Leadership

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP IS THE MOOD AND TONE LEADERS CREATE WHICH COMPELS PEOPLE TO WORK TOGETHER, GIVE THEIR BEST AND GROW. OR NOT.

Whether leadership is viewed in terms of competencies, skills or behaviors (or none of the above), we believe the starting point is Personal Leadership – it’s the mood and tone leaders create which compels people to work together, give their best and grow. Or not.

Sometimes the everyday irritations — sleepless nights, alarm clocks which don’t work, traffic, weather, illness, competitors, bad bosses, moody teenagers — make it very challenging to manage our mood and tone at work. Embracing personal leadership is accepting we are all 100% accountable for the mood and tone we take into the office and bring home.

Transformational coaching expert Katherine Holt put it this way: “Cultivating the ‘being’ dimension of human experience requires getting in touch with our identity as well as our energetic presence and then behaving in more congruent and authentic ways.”

It’s all too common for traditional approaches to overlook this key step, to the detriment of everything that follows. Most good leaders have climbed the ladder because of “what they do.” Eventually they have to cultivate the “who they are” as well. What is the leader’s personal purpose? How does it align with the company’s vision and values? A coach can’t build a successful strategy without this aspirational reflection of the leader. Assessing the Seven Fs of faith, family, finances, fitness, friends, fun and future is an excellent way to start. The Personal Leadership Benchmark Tool gives each leader a baseline number, a reference point to help establish personal growth objectives and get friends and family members involved in the coaching.

Creating Momentum: Exploring Aspirations

COACHES GUIDE, DIRECT AND CHALLENGE, BUT THE MOTIVATION HAS TO COME FROM THE LEADER. ASPIRATIONS CREATE MOTIVATION.

Aspirations are typically articulated in the form of a personal vision statement that motivates growth behaviors. Adrienna, for example, was determined to demonstrate her effectiveness in a volatile, emerging growth company environment, away from the corporate machine that shaped her career and she wanted to set an example for her daughters. As a result, she was highly motivated to re-think her leadership. Deep down inside, she recognized the truth in executive coaching guru Marshall Goldsmith’s famous line: “What got you here, won’t get you there.”

Her coach asked this important aspiration question: What does the next level of leadership look like to you?
Her aspiration was to “get an A” as a parent, spouse and a leader in a start-up. She wanted to prove she could build trust and deliver value outside a structured corporate environment.

Positive momentum begins by celebrating what we’ve overcome to get where we are today and savoring the goodness we have received along the way. The Personal Visioning Tool is used to help leaders celebrate their body of work over the past seven years and then provide a framework for looking seven years into the future. Viewing our careers on a 14-year continuum is a powerful way to crystallize aspirations for the next level.

The best coaching situation is created when the leader has a coaching sponsor — a manager or Board member who endorses the aspiration and pledges support to help the leader grow. Adrienna was fortunate her eccentric new boss suggested coaching. He was a strong sponsor and she welcomed the help.

How Aspirations Create Momentum: Here’s how one senior executive, an EVP of Marketing and Financial Services, describes her experience of growing by exploring her aspirations:

The personal visioning worksheet really caused me to change my focus. For me the ‘next level’ meant I would likely be retired and gone from this organization in seven years...it really stopped me in my tracks. I savored the successes I had in the younger parts of my career and assessed the parts of this job I really, truly enjoy...I also started working harder on the one or two big contributions I wanted to leave this company as my legacy. As a result, I started coaching my team with greater intentions, embracing the idea one day one of them could have my job as the head of Marketing.

Gaining Insight: Experience and Personality as Catalysts

Experience can be one of our best teachers, but only if we are deliberate about seeking out and applying its lessons.

Coaches help leaders produce insights through structured reflection and personality tools. That is important because we know from recent brain research “self-insight” is the most powerful and sustainable way to change behavior.

Every leader has strengths that become counterproductive under pressure. We call these “dark side” behaviors. My favorite personality tool is the Hogan Development Survey because it helps leaders learn about where they are most likely to get themselves in trouble under stress. In Adrienna’s case, she discovered her dark side was keeping her from having the courage to make big decisions. She was naturally inclined to over-think situations and spend too much energy seeking the approval of others. Working with a coach allowed her to see the consequences of her dark side behavior. She also discovered new ways to approach her work under stress to get the results she needed.
In his work as an assessment expert and coach, David Donnay observed “the relationship between behavior and performance is often curvilinear. It is possible to demonstrate too little or too much of a good thing. Successful leadership behavior is ultimately about balance – finding the most effective way to show up under a wide range of pressures and demands.”

Insight is key, he says. “Every leader has limitations or watch-out areas as well as strengths. Self-deception is common, insight less so. But the leaders who possess insight consistently get better results and succeed more easily at the next level,” he explains. “When we recognize our deeply embedded behavior patterns, we can learn to compensate through feedback, development and coaching. Insight into our behavior provides a strategic roadmap for maximizing strengths and minimizing risks.”

How Experience and Personality Serve as a Catalyst for Change: Here’s how the CEO of a mid-sized national construction company learned to handle himself differently through this process:

The dark side information really changed how I see my leadership. My coach pointed out the one thing that consistently causes me to most trouble: I’m excitable and imaginative, which means under pressure I tend to pull away from others because I’m disappointed – and worse yet, I retreat and re-invent my own version of what happened that is more comfortable to me. When I finally engage again, the people around me are confused with how I interpreted the situation. I’ve actually been accused of lying! That really hurts. But you know what? The assessment nailed how my personality can work against me under pressure. Today, I know I need to stand in there during the heat of the battle and work through the tension right there in the moment. I keep my Dark Side Report with me in my briefcase at all times. It really works for me.

Leveraging Observations: Seeking the Perspective of Others

Followers are always watching. They see us at our best and our worst, and they provide great advice if we take the time to listen.

The highest art form of leadership is getting powerful people to work together. Coaches typically bring a full toolbox of observation techniques to gather observations from managers, peers, friends and followers. Popular approaches include structured interviews, multi-rater (360) online surveys, direct observation and even videotaping.

We find the highest leverage comes from directly engaging the leadership team in the coaching process. It’s critical today, because our research indicates that 75% of leaders say they were never taught how to build a strong team. It’s one of those things we were supposed to learn through sports, Girl Scouts, school groups, our families or being on teams in business. But even if we did learn from those experiences, did we
Learn the right lessons? Half of leaders we surveyed say they’ve never worked on a high-performing team. So how is the this half supposed to learn?

Adrienna leaned on her coach to learn how to get better results through her team. She learned how to develop both the relational and structural elements of a good team and she concentrated on creating these two conditions:

1. Team members care about one another both personally and professionally.
2. Team members consistently build plans and solve problems together.

Through the use of the proprietary Team Momentum Survey® she learned:

• how people on her team worked together—or didn’t—and what impact this had on results.
• how planning, decision-making and follow-through were tied together with communication and trust.
• how peers could coach one another to grow both personally and professionally.

Adrienna quickly learned she was taking the superhero approach to team leadership, meaning she put all of the responsibility on her own shoulders to diagnose where the business was out of alignment. She stayed up late building plans and felt the responsibility to solve the most difficult problems all by herself. As a result, she was breaking down under the weight of her self-imposed obligations and her new team didn’t know how to get her attention. The Team Momentum Survey® helped her see how building shared commitments with the team increased their trust, created more urgency in their endeavors and accelerated the turnaround.
How Leveraging Observations through a Focus on the Team Benefits the Leader: An EVP of Information Technology describes the impact of focusing on team effectiveness this way:

Honestly, after 25 years in business, I really had no idea what made a team high performing — I’d never been on a great team. Today, I know I was trying to be “Wonder Woman,” making all of the decisions. Just the idea of applying equal amounts of energy towards relationships and the structural parts of planning and execution was a big leap forward for me and my team. Our coach helped us arrive at better clarity around roles and responsibilities, and decision-making transparency. That was a huge step on the path to actually trusting each other.

Ready to Grow: Planning and Goal Setting
ASPIRATIONS, INSIGHT AND OBSERVATIONS ONLY CREATE MOVEMENT WITH GOALS AND ACTION PLANS APPLIED DIRECTLY TO THE BUSINESS.

Planning begins at this moment of truth:
What am I willing to do differently to get to the next level?

The Personal Leadership Blueprint helps summarize the learning into specific Step Up Challenges within the business. It’s a practical, one-page document that keeps the most important information top of mind and serves as an efficient communication tool to allow peers and colleagues to be involved in the coaching process.

The moment of truth for Adrienna came when she shared her Personal Leadership Blueprint openly with her entire team. She began their second offsite meeting by celebrating the insights she gained from their observations in the coaching process. It was the first time in her career she was willing to be vulnerable and honest about her skill gaps – and the first time she ever openly asked her team for help. That one facilitated offsite meeting changed the trajectory of her career forever.

How Personal Leadership Planning and Goal Setting Fuels Growth: The president of a mid-size private growth company shares this story:

I literally ran Paul Batz down in an airport one day. I wanted to show him I am still carrying my Personal Leadership Blueprint in my planner everywhere three years after finishing coaching. The process of identifying what other people saw as my strengths and how I get derailed under pressure was nerve-wracking for me. But as I shared my blueprint, my relationships began to improve. And for the first time in years, people were actually offering to help move the difficult things in our business forward. Personally, I benefitted from the transparency and the humility. I needed the tool to help me realize I was building up walls people didn’t want to penetrate.
Getting to the Next Level: Step Up Challenges
CONFIDENCE AND SUPPORT ARE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS TO LEADERSHIP GROWTH.

Coaches help leaders stay confident and focused on specific growth objectives called Step Up Challenges. Together, the coach and leader push the boundaries of what’s possible – both in applying new skills, new behaviors and belief in the next level.

The best coaches establish and preserve these three conditions in the coaching process:

1. Permission with peers and followers to provide their observations freely, without fear.
2. A safe place for the leader to think out loud under pressure and a neutral sounding board for testing out ideas.
3. A reminder system to help the leader maintain self-confidence, because without confidence leaders cannot grow.

What Really Works in Coaching

In general, effective coaching engagements span six to eighteen months, depending on the size of the challenge and the needs of the leader. Senior executives benefit the most when they work with a coach through two annual planning cycles, applying the learning from the first year to the second year. Regardless of the duration, the most successful coaching has these elements in common:

• Clear and compelling aspirations that motivate the leader to re-think their approach to leadership, including the personal life changes necessary to allow them to show up at work prepared to control their emotions.

• A strong coaching sponsor to keep the Step Up Challenges focused on the learning most critical for reaching the next level.

• Involving the team to establish transparency and accountability for growth, as well as teaching everyone involved how to build a high-performing team.

• A neutral sounding board and positive energy to keep the process moving. That’s no small task in the life of most busy organizations today.

• Coaches who bring a briefcase of tools to help jumpstart the learning, document the growth and provide timely insight.

“Transformational coaching enables leaders to shift the paradigm for themselves or others. It involves working with leaders on their vision or purpose, helping them to see the bigger picture, and then encouraging them to set their goals even higher, beyond what they thought they could do.”

Katherine Holt
The Next Level: The Rest of the Story

Today, Adrienna has reached her Next Level: She is working less, having more fun and getting better business results.

Over the course of 18 months, she clarified the roles and responsibilities of her team and repositioned nearly every manager in the company. Through voluntary and involuntary staff reductions, she was able to increase incentive compensation and reduce payroll costs by 17%. With the extra funding, her new leadership team developed a powerful marketing and distribution plan that grew sales 11% in her second year.

Not only has Adrienna been invited to join the Board of the holding company, she also has blended her schedule so she can see most of her daughters’ volleyball games and cheer competitions. And she’s found a reliable new friend who will watch the girls so her husband can travel with her three or four times a year to conferences and industry meetings.

⇒ So how did coaching help Adrienna? Here’s what she told us:

That’s a great question! It helped in so many ways. First, I needed to give myself permission to trust my husband with the family life, so I could focus on my role as President. I had to learn how to make shrewd, but fair decisions about talent…so we could invest in the right things for the business. Everyone around me knew what we needed to do — they just needed me to demonstrate the courage to do it! My dark side caused me to over-think things under stress and seek the approval of others. That was the really hard part for me. But my coach helped keep my spirits high during the hardest times. The Personal Leadership Benchmark tool helped me keep my personal and professional life in perspective, and the coach helped me hold up a mirror so I could stay true to my roles as a leader, a wife and mother. But probably the best thing was I really stepped up to my responsibilities as a coach and team developer for my own staff. The time spent on my people was by far the biggest return on my time.

For more information about the leadership coaching/consulting, books, tools and processes of Good Leadership Enterprises, contact Paul Batz, Founder and President.
ABOUT GOOD LEADERSHIP ENTERPRISES

The publishing and consulting company Good Leadership Enterprises is a branded statement of founder Paul Batz’s belief in practical everyday wisdom that makes a difference. His mission is to spread goodness and leadership in business.

Through the combination of leadership consulting, research-based publishing, and speaking and events, the firm creates positive momentum in both the personal and professional lives of leaders.