

If you want to be a better leader, hire a coach. Like an Olympic athlete, you can't get there on your own. You need someone who knows the drills that will increase your strength and skill, and push you to be better than you ever thought you could be.

Enrolling in a leadership course to develop your skill can be very beneficial, but it will not be tailored for your particular development needs. When you hire a coach, you hire a thought partner. You can talk out loud about your strategy, your team and your wild ideas.

A coach can help you reclaim balance, prepare for a critical interview, find your next job, expand on your vision. Your coach will nudge you out of your comfort zone and give you straight feedback without worrying about whether or not you like it. An executive coach is a partner in your leadership success.

It's no longer a stigma to have a coach; it's a status symbol. More and more executives know the power of having a coach beside them. It's a signal that your company is proactive and willing to invest in you — they see your potential and want more of it. Our clients in the Northwest are smart and it shows: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Puget Sound Energy, Microsoft, Neighborcare Health, LifeCenter Northwest.

Kelly, the CFO for a national health care company, was in over her head. She had a geographically dispersed team, she was working too many hours and had an infant at home. She knew she needed help and working with an executive coach seemed like a decent place to start. Together they sifted through her current experience to see the patterns and shifts and wrong turns. Her coach's job was to mirror back what she heard from a higher perspective, from the "balcony" as Ron Heifetz calls it.

At the end of their first session, they had a plan — a clear strategy to help Kelly prioritize, delegate and lead her team in more effective ways.

So, what might happen if you say "yes" to having a coach?

Your coach will gather feedback about how others perceive you — what they think about your strengths and weaknesses — sometimes this is done via a 360-degree assessment, other times via interviews with people who work with you. This will give your coach a good sense about where to start with you. Together, you will create an action plan for the next few months — actions you will take to change your habits, behaviors, perspective. All for the better. Then, you get to work.

Executive coaches typically work with their client six to 12 months and always one-to-one in a highly confidential structure. You will meet regularly with your coach, to make sure you haven't gotten too busy with your regular day job, that you are moving your plan forward and to work any current challenges.

Focus and follow-through are what you will need for the kind of changes that will serve you for years to come. Challenges that seem impossible on your own can be addressed in partnership. Leadership dreams gone dormant can be brought back to life and new visions can emerge.