

Rock, paper, scissors

Executive coaches can help you make sound decisions. **By Gail R. Meneley**

Rock breaks scissors, paper covers rock and scissors cut paper. As a senior executive, you make decisions based on your experience and available knowledge. At times, you consider the opinion of others, and at other times, you go it alone.

Fortunately you never had to rely on the childhood game Rock, Paper, Scissors for help. You are a time-tested executive who has won your share of business battles and learned from those you lost. So, why would you need the help of an executive coach at this point in your career?

Executive coaching is not reserved for those who are up-and-coming. After working with hundreds of senior executives, coaches recognize the benefits that come from having a trusted confidant. A coach is sometimes the only source of honest feedback you are going to receive.

■ **Unbiased feedback.** The saying, “It’s lonely at the top” can only be appreciated by someone who has been in that seat. You wonder if people are only telling you what they think you want to hear, you are blindsided by bad news because your people are protecting you or people have their own agendas that often influence their advice or counsel.

An independent executive coach provides unbiased feedback — the good and the bad — and is motivated by taking your game to the next level so that you and your business can be successful.

■ **Confidential conversation.** Almost all top executives have been burned by someone sharing confidential information about them at some point in their careers. These breaches of confidence are not only hurtful, they can also be extremely detrimental to the business. Your unique relationship with a coach allows you to talk about personal and professional challenges in complete confidence.

■ **Senior executive experience.** The most effective and empathetic executive coach is one who has walked in your shoes. A certified executive coach who is also a seasoned senior executive can pro-



vide enormous perspective and insight, can help you weigh alternative strategies and approaches, and can talk to you honestly about the need to raise the level of your game without risking your job.

Senior executives are learning the hard way that there are different skill sets required for success in today’s business environment. Although there are many reasons to engage an executive coach, there are several common challenges — dysfunctional senior team relationships that interfere with business results; learning to lead in a challenging, multicultural business environment; and successfully building and nurturing a positive relationship with the board of directors.

■ **Aligning a dysfunctional senior team.** There have always been — and will continue to be — challenges in managing relationships in a group of ambitious, aggressive, competitive executives. An experienced professional coach can facilitate an open dialogue about how the team

must function to capitalize on opportunities in the market.

■ **Capitalizing on a multicultural work force.** The hierarchical command-and-control leadership style that once dominated U.S. business is no longer effective. Only by encouraging people to challenge the status quo can U.S. companies innovate and compete globally. Authority has been replaced by the need to influence so that organizations can benefit from the diverse insights that come from a multicultural work force and customer base.

■ **Strengthening board relationships.** CEOs are faced with changing board relationships. They used to be able to hand-pick board members with whom they had much in common, but Sarbanes Oxley now requires the addition of independent board members.

CEOs often forget that this introduces a powerful new dynamic that requires focus, time and energy so that they develop and nurture relationships with new board members.

Rock, Paper, Scissors is a decision-making game of wit, speed, dexterity and strategy between players who can’t reach a decision using any other means. There is only one winner.

Whether it is dealing with an increasingly diverse work force, finding a need to think through confidential, complex business strategies or people decisions, or needing help to successfully navigating peer and board relationships, having an executive coach can be enormously helpful in making sound decisions that will contribute to the growth of your business.

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