

Career Coach Can Assist Workers' Jump to New Jobs

The Buffalo News, N.Y.

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Jun. 21--In the world of sports, it's obvious that teams and individual athletes benefit greatly from the wisdom and perspective of a coach.

While the players understand the game and their responsibilities, the coach on the sidelines can see the entire field of play and develop strategies to minimize weaknesses and harness strengths and talents.

It turns out a coach can play a similar role in the work world. A career coach can assist a mid-career worker make a leap in a new direction or hone leadership skills for internal promotion, help recent college graduates chart a course into a career, or guide an unemployed person into a fresh opportunity.

"I help a person go someplace they never would have gone by themselves," said Geri Grossman, founder of My Executive Coach, a Williamsville-based career coaching firm.

Grossman, whose own career path includes running an executive search agency in New Jersey and serving as Human Resources chief for Ingram Micro prior to launching her own business in 2001, said her client base is very diverse.

"I've worked with judges, deans, hospital administrators, executives who have been "downsized," as well as housewives who haven't worked in 10 years," she said. "The one thing they have in common is they want to sharpen their skills so who they are and what they have to offer comes through to themselves and employers."

Wendy, a former elementary school teacher and vice principal, is among those who have turned to coaching to start a whole new career. While she loved the educational environment, she craved a new challenge.

"I wanted a change, but I was scared to death to step out of my safe job into a world of the unknown," she said.

Now a successful marketing chief with a local manufacturing firm, Wendy, who asked that her last name not be disclosed, is relishing a new work life that includes long hours and a hectic schedule of trips to Europe and South America for client

meetings.

"I was a good teacher, but I'm a better corporate executive," she said. "It turns out I thrive on the competition aspects of marketing and sales, and I never would have predicted this in a million years. It took a career coach to dig down into my competencies and personality and find my potential."

Grossman said a career coach offers services that are part- therapist and part-employment counselor, with a heavy dose of listening skills.

"Many of my clients arrive with no clue of how much potential they have. They don't see themselves objectively," she said. "My job is to practice the art of active listening and then hold up the mirror so they can see what they are all about."

Grossman said often times clients come to her requesting help with writing a resume, not realizing they are really looking to be put under the coaching microscope.

"They know they are having trouble writing a resume, but they don't know why," she explained.

This personal inventory process is useful for job seekers and career-changers, but also executives seeking a reality check of their leadership skills. Amber Slichta, executive director of HeathforAll of Western New York, turned to Grossman to fine-tune her leadership strategies.

"It was extremely helpful to examine my existing leadership style," said the nurse/accountant-turned agency chief. "It was very productive to work with someone to look at my strengths and areas that needed work, versus doing it on my own."

Slichta, who worked with her coach for six months, said she plans to go through the process again in a few years to stay at the top of her game.