



Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart: A Systems Approach to Engaging Leaders with Their Challenges

Mary Beth A. O'Neill

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Praise for Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart

"In this book, O'Neill brings form and structure to the art of executive coaching. Novices are provided a path while seasoned practitioners will find affirmation."

--Daryl R. Conner, CEO and president, ODR-USA, Inc.

"Mary Beth O'Neill's executive coaching gave me the tools and clarity to become a far more effective leader and change agent. The bottom line was that we succeeded with a monumental organizational turnaround that had seemed impossible to accomplish."

--Eric Stevens, former CEO, Courage Center

"O'Neill writes in a way that allows you to see this experienced coach in action. What a wonderful way to learn!"

--Geoff Bellman, consultant and author, *The Consultant's Calling*

"Mary Beth brings a keen business focus to coaching by not just contributing insights but through helping me and my team gain the insights that we need to solve our own problems. She has the ability to see through the sometimes chaotic dialogue and personalities in order to help a team focus on the real issues and dynamics that can impede organizations from achieving their goals."

--John C. Nicol, general manager, MSN Media Network

"Effective leaders require courage, compassion, and initiative. O'Neill's systems-based coaching serves as a guide for both coaches and executives to better enable good decisions and good decision-makers."

--Paul D. Purcell, president, Beacon Development Group

"With Mary Beth O'Neill's coaching, I've become the kind of leader who balances both the needs to get results and to develop great working relationships. Since I started working with her, I've won accolades as the Top Innovator for my company, and as Professional of the Year for my industry. More important, I've been able to scope my job in a way that allows me to learn and contribute at the same time, all the while delivering great results to the bottom line."

--Lynann Bradbury, vice president, Waggener Edstrom

Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart: A Systems Approach to Engaging Leaders with Their Challenges Details

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From Reader Review Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart: A Systems Approach to Engaging Leaders with Their Challenges for online ebook

Karen Catlin says

Recommended by Joe Dunn and Jody P

Ralf Kruse says

There are sometimes the right books at the right time. This book challenged me in my coaching approach and I'm fairly happy, that I read it.

Jeff Lampson says

I really like many aspects of this book. O'Neill comes from a strong systems and performance orientation. Additionally, I was very intrigued with the way she has applied the classic OD action-research approach to coaching:

- Entry & Contracting
- Data collection and feedback
- Action planning
- Implementation and follow through
- Evaluation

I feel very comfortable with this framework and see how it is generalizes to Executive Coaching.

The client responsibility model is crucial for managing the players in the coaching process and for the coach to avoid becoming triangulated and a potentially dysfunctional member of the system.

Her orientation is consistently strong for linking coaching to business outcomes. Her one page summary for business goals and measures is excellent. I have already made it a template for use with clients. It covers bottom line, process and human system goals. Highly useful.

Bob says

This book was highly recommended in coaching training that I received this summer. I can see why. First of all, the two basic ideas of backbone and heart. Backbone is the idea of not caving on contracted goals and action plans. Heart is entering deeply into your client's goals, challenges, and personal development needs.

O'Neill begins the book by discussing the coach's posture as one of results orientation, partnership, engaging

specific leadership challenges and linking team behaviors with business goals. She then explores the critical element of establishing a signature presence in the stressful climate of coaching rather than simply trying to please the client. One of the most helpful elements in this chapter was her discussion of immediacy--connecting what is going on in the coaching conversation with the client's behavior 'out there'. Chances are, if you are reacting in a certain way, superiors and reports probably are as well. She concludes this section with two chapters on systems thinking--understanding how your clients challenges are shaped by their organizational system and understanding triangles and how to deal with being part of one (particularly by not becoming a surrogate for client or boss).

Part two moves on to the four phases of coaching methodology. Phase One is contracting and focuses on clearly defined goals in three areas: business results, team interactions, and leader interpersonal behaviors. O'Neill's system always links the last two to clearly established business results. Phase Two is planning with a strong emphasis on action plans that are established and implemented by the client and plans that provide alternative behaviors to co-created dysfunctional patterns. Phase Three is Live Action Coaching, where the coach works with the client and his or her team in an actual business setting. The coach doesn't take over meeting but works with the client and team in prompting responses that accord with the coaching plan rather than pre-existing patterns. Phase Four is debriefing, which debriefs both client and coach effectiveness and establishes next steps.

The book concludes with chapters on determining the Return on Investment in coaching, making the transition in your work to coaching, and helping leaders coach their supervisees (key here is to be clear when you are speaking as boss and when you are speaking as coach).

While my coaching will be in a ministry building situation, I see many parallels, including the needs to establish clear results, working on staff behaviors and team interactions, identifying unhelpful patterns and the four stages in the coaching process. I suspect I will come back to this book again and again and I would recommend it to others who would like a good reference on effective coaching.

Alex Wong says

Systematically written with lots of practical tips for coaching. The examples illustrate the ideas and approaches very well. This definitely takes time to digest and also deserves several readings.

Volodymyr Dehtyarov says

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Carlos Xavier says

The narrator is boring... it made a very interesting and useful book sound dull

Barry Davis says

Subtitled “A Systems Approach to Engaging Leaders with Their Challenges,” this is a practical and information approach to the field of coaching. The author begins with a brief introduction to the process of executive coaching, citing four key ingredients: Maintaining a results orientation, Partnership, Engaging the specific leadership challenges, and Linking team behaviors to the bottom-line goals (including the need to set specific expectations for teams). O’Neill’s “backbone and heart” themes is explained in these two sentences: “Backbone means knowing and clearly stating your position, whether it is popular or not. Heart is staying engaged in the relationship and reaching out even when that relationship is mired in conflict.”

The author goes on to make a solid case for “developing a strong signature presence” while emphasizing the “systems” nature of working with the executive who is easily triangulated with others (including the coach). The effective coach, she argues, is able to work from the “middle of the triangle” to assist the coachee in real change. Using a number of vignettes in stepping through the process, O’Neill deals with what she calls the four phases of coaching:

Phase 1 - Contracting: Find a way to be a partner

Phase 2 - Planning: Keep the ownership with the client

Phase 3 - Live Action Coaching - Strike while the iron is hot

Phase 4 - Debriefing - Define a learning focus

In closing this portion of the book, O’Neill posits what she calls “An ROI Method for Executive Coaching: Have the Client Convince the Coach of the Return on Investment.

The final section of this exceptional book, Special Applications, deals with diverse topics including making the transition to executive coaching, helping the leader coach employees, and coaching for the coach. Appendices include reviewing the core activities and outcomes of coaching, a self-assessment on coaching skills, questions to use with clients, and suggestions on combining consulting and coaching for enhanced results.

Sarah says

This was an excellent book explaining many systems concepts that I was unfamiliar with. Its definitely a new member in my top five book list.

Tiffany says

I will be adding this book to my coaching resources shelf, for sure. There were great tips about managing yourself in ambiguity, questions that help test the client's willingness to scrutinize their role, the 3 key factors methodology for goal setting, and the ROI method were all noteworthy.

Paula Fitzgerald says

It is one that I go back to regularly. Mary Beth taught the coaching class for my master's degree and has rich experience and depth impacting leaders and organizations.

Ron says

This was a re-read for me. I read this years ago when I first set out on my own as an executive coach. There were parts of this book at the time that were beyond where I was at the time, and re-reading it now I realize that there are many parts of my practice that are beyond what this book outlines. Still, a valuable resource to revisit with some really solid points of emphasis for any practicing coach: in particular, maintaining that presence with a client where you show that mix of backbone and heart. You have to care, and you have to have courage to tell them like it is. You have to risk pissing off someone who has hired you. You have to genuinely care about them enough to do this.

There are also some good things about the overlap between coaching and consulting, but frankly, there are whole books on this aspect of coaching. What sets this book apart is seeing yourself as part of a system with the client and his/her environment.
