

MULTIDIMENSIONAL
EXECUTIVE COACHING

RUTH L. ORENSTEIN, PsyD, consults, teaches, researches, and writes in the area of organizational psychology, specializing in executive development at the individual and group level. She is president of Princeton Consulting Resources, Inc. (PCRI), a member of the part-time faculties of Rutgers University's Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology and the Wharton School's Aresty Institute of Executive Education, and a founding board member of the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching.

Dr. Orenstein has extensive consulting experience in both corporate and nonprofit organizations and has provided executive coaching to hundreds of senior leaders. She has held senior line-management positions in several Fortune corporations and, prior to founding PCRI, was a senior vice president at the Chemical Banking Corporation, with full profit-and-loss responsibility for the retail branch system in central and southern New Jersey. She has taught courses in management and organizational psychology at the graduate and undergraduate levels at the New School for Social Research, Adelphi University, and Rutgers University, where she also created and directed the Organizational Psychology Consulting Group at the Center for Applied Psychology.

Dr. Orenstein is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Queens College (City University of New York) with a BA in English literature and holds an MS in management from the University of Utah and a PsyD in organizational psychology from Rutgers University. She has published several landmark articles on executive coaching and is the recipient of the American Psychological Association's RHR International Outstanding Dissertation Award for her work, *Executive Coaching: An Integrative Model*.

Multidimensional Executive Coaching

Ruth L. Orenstein, PsyD


SPRINGER PUBLISHING COMPANY
NEW YORK

Copyright © 2007 Ruth L. Orenstein

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Springer Publishing Company, LLC.

Springer Publishing Company, LLC
11 West 42nd Street
New York, NY 10036
www.springerpub.com

Acquisitions Editor: Sheri W. Sussman

Project Manager: Carol Cain

Cover design: Joanne E. Honigman

Composition: Apex Publishing, LLC

07 08 09 10/ 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Orenstein, Ruth L.

Multidimensional executive coaching / Ruth L. Orenstein.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8261-2566-8 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8261-2566-2 (alk. paper)

1. Executive coaching. 2. Organizational change. 3. Organizational effectiveness. I. Title.

HD30.4.O743 2007

658.4'07124—dc22 2007005890

Printed in the United States of America by Bang Printing

This book is dedicated to Nathan Friedman and Stanley Orenstein
in loving and grateful memory

Contents

List of Figures and Tables	xi
Foreword by Kenneth Eisold, PhD	xiii
Preface	xvii
Acknowledgments	xxi

Part I. Multidimensional Executive Coaching: Foundations

CHAPTER 1	Multidimensional Executive Coaching in Action: The Case of Margaret	3
CHAPTER 2	The State of the Executive Coaching Field: Current and Antecedent Literature	15
	Current Literature	
	Antecedent Literature	
CHAPTER 3	The Conceptual Framework: A Multidimensional Perspective	25
	Individual and Organization	
	Unconscious Forces	
	Multilevel Forces	
	Use of Self	

Part II. Multidimensional Executive Coaching: The Practice

Phase I. Entry

CHAPTER 4	Initial Contact	41
	The Case of Howard	
	The Case of Jeanne	
	The Case of Richard	
	Analysis: The Cases of Howard, Jeanne, and Richard	

CHAPTER 5	Preliminary Meeting	47
	The Case of Howard	
	The Case of Jeanne	
	The Case of Mary	
	Analysis: The Cases of Howard, Jeanne, and Mary	
CHAPTER 6	Joint Goal Setting	57
	The Client	
	The Manager	
	The Relationship	
	The Organization	
	The Case of Howard	
	The Case of Jeanne	
	Analysis: The Cases of Howard and Jeanne	
CHAPTER 7	The Coaching Contract	65
	The Case of Howard	
	The Case of Jeanne	
	Analysis: The Cases of Howard and Jeanne	
	<i>Phase II. Facilitating Change</i>	
CHAPTER 8	Assessment	71
	The Psychodynamic Interview	
	The 360-Degree Interviews	
	Observation	
	Use of Self	
	The Case of Jim	
	The Case of Steven	
	The Case of Jack	
	Analysis: The Cases of Jim, Steven, and Jack	
CHAPTER 9	Feedback	83
	Feedback Preparation	
	The Oral Feedback Report	
	The Written Feedback Report	
	The Case of Jeanne	
	The Case of Jack	
	The Case of Cara	
	Analysis: The Cases of Jeanne, Jack, and Cara	

CHAPTER 10	Objectives Setting	93
	The Case of Ken	
	The Case of Sonia	
	Analysis: The Cases of Ken and Sonia	
CHAPTER 11	Formal Coaching	99
	The Foundation: Preceding Stages	
	The Venue: Regularly Scheduled Meetings	
	Interventions: Methods and Techniques	
	The Case of Ken	
	The Case of Jeanne	
	The Case of Jack	
	Analysis: The Cases of Ken, Jeanne, and Jack	
	 <i>Phase III. Concluding Coaching</i>	
CHAPTER 12	Outcome Evaluation	119
	Method 1: Objectives	
	Method 2: Interviews	
	Method 3: The Empathic Organic Questionnaire	
	The Case of Henry	
CHAPTER 13	Concluding the Coaching Process	137
	The Case of Jeanne	
	Analysis: The Case of Jeanne	
 Part III. Multidimensional Executive Coaching: Practical Considerations		
CHAPTER 14	Identifying Potential Coaching Failures: When to Decline or Exit a Coaching Engagement	143
	Factors in the Client	
	Factors in the Organization	
	Factors in the Consultant	
	Identifying Potential Failures	
CHAPTER 15	Implications for Practice	151
	Education and Training	
	Coaching Versus Therapy	
	Dual Relationships	
	Confidentiality	

Conflict of Interest

Use of Self

**Part IV. Multidimensional Executive Coaching:
Bringing It All Together**

CHAPTER 16 Multidimensional Executive Coaching: Summary 159

Guiding Theory

Approach

Practical Aspects

CHAPTER 17 The Case of Margaret: A Multidimensional Analysis 163

Theoretical Analysis

Analysis of Approach

Coaching Meetings and Interventions

Practice Issues

Appendices

Appendix A. Sample Contracts 171

Appendix A-1. Sample Contract: Full Coaching Project

*Appendix A-2. Sample Contract: Phased Coaching Project
with Travel Requirements*

*Appendix A-3. Sample Contract: Continuation of Phased
Coaching Project*

Appendix B. Sample Coaching Plans 174

Appendix B-1. Sample Coaching Plan: Full Coaching Project

Appendix B-2. Sample Coaching Plan: Phased Coaching Project

*Appendix B-3. Sample Coaching Plan: Continuation of Phased
Coaching Project*

Appendix C. Sample 360-Degree Interview Protocols 177

*Appendix C-1. Sample 360-Degree Interview Protocol: Generic
Management Skills*

*Appendix C-2. Sample 360-Degree Interview Protocol: Customized
Leadership Skills*

Appendix D. Sample Feedback Reports 181

*Appendix D-1. Sample Feedback Report: Client A (Clear
Strengths)*

Appendix D-2. Sample Feedback Report: Client B (All Complex)

Appendix E. Sample Organic Questionnaire 191

References 199

Index 203

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

11.1.	Coaching and preceding phases	100
11.2.	Basic components of coaching meetings	102
11.3.	Coaching meetings—Unexpected priorities	103
11.4.	Coaching meetings—Full cycle	104
16.1.	Multidimensional theory	161

Tables

12.1.	Behaviors Directly Related to Coaching Objectives	133
12.2.	Behaviors Indirectly Related to Coaching Objectives	133
12.3.	Strengths (Control Category)	134
12.4.	Mean Differences by Category	135
15.1.	Education and Training of Executive Coaches	152

Foreword

This is a wise book in several ways.

First of all, it describes the work of a wise practitioner who is able to provide exceptionally thoughtful and reliable help to her clients, synthesizing a complex and diverse array of perspectives in the process.

Ruth Orenstein sees individuals shrewdly and deeply, targeting their capacity to receive the help she can offer and, in response, adapt and change their behaviors at work. But she also understands the organizations in which they work, the factors that constrain their effectiveness and also provide the opportunities for them to succeed. Sizing up the work environments in which problems arise, she is able to discriminate where the real difficulties lie, helping her clients to see the ways in which she can best help them. Many clients tend to blame themselves for their difficulties—that is, if they don't entirely blame others. Orenstein demonstrates again and again that she can see through the confusion and pain she is presented with—as well as the misleading certainties—and discern the underlying issues.

She also understands herself and how her reactions provide important clues as to the meaning of what her clients say and do. This may be her most important talent, the source of her most reliable insights into what is really going on. Knowing herself, she can see more clearly into the hearts and minds of others. Trusting her own reactions and perceptions, she can know what to trust in others, what to believe, and what to question.

But this is not merely the effect of a unique and ineffable talent. It is the product of training and hard work in mastering several crucially important disciplines. This is the second way in which this book is wise: it introduces us to the concepts, the research, the practices, and traditions that have informed Orenstein's own professional development. She allows us to see that there is no mystery or accident behind her success. She makes clear that these ways of thinking and working, developed over many years by a number of serious professionals, have enabled her to become a skilled and thoughtful practitioner—and they can also enable others as well. Education and training are the keys to effective coaching in the “multidimensional” approach this book describes, and she lets us know clearly what is involved.

This does not diminish Orenstein's achievement in any way. She is an immensely talented, empathic, and creative person who has brought those

qualities to her training and her work. Not everyone has what she has, certainly in the requisite degree. The work of coaching she describes is not for the indifferently equipped or marginally talented. But for those who have the talent, she has shown the way.

She has also described with exceptional clarity how these multiple dimensions of individual psychoanalytic, group dynamics, and systems thinking impinge on each other and interpenetrate in practice. Even those who are familiar with the thinking she describes can learn from how she moves deftly among these perspectives, shifting her focus as her work with individual clients dictates. Her ideas have been honed by years of effective practice.

Even so, with this arsenal of tools and the various strategies they suggest, one cannot always succeed. Not everyone actually wants to be helped or is open to the ideas and insights required to change their behavior. Moreover, not every organization that brings in a coach, ostensibly to “help” a distressed or promising executive, actually wants that person to succeed. They may believe they do, and they may be willing to pay for help, but that hardly means a willingness to face the problems that have been located in those persons or reassess the dilemmas assigned to those sectors of the organization. And that is part of wisdom, too: to try one’s best to help but be willing to walk away from jobs that cannot be done or to refuse assignments of dubious value. Orenstein has been through these difficult straits again and again, and she has much of value to say about them.

This book is particularly valuable today. Coaching addresses an important and growing need as businesses and other organizations face unprecedented pressures, not only from the market but also from new technologies and rapid demographic shifts. As a field of practice, it has expanded at an extraordinary rate, offering help for beleaguered executives at a time when corporate hierarchies are constantly shifting and the informal networks of mentors and colleagues that once provided guidance and support have been substantially eroded. Executives crave help—so long as it is not seen as a sign of incompetence or failure—and corporations are eager to provide it, as busy senior executives often want to avoid becoming enmeshed in relations with those who report to them. I also think they frequently want to avoid what they do not have the time or patience to provide themselves, and often look forward to engaging experts who they can believe have the understanding and skills they lack. To put it bluntly, much of coaching today is mentoring outsourced.

On the other side, coaching attracts many who have convinced themselves that they understand the skills needed for success, or who have gone through brief training that promises such understanding. It is frequently asserted that it has nothing to do with psychotherapy, the neighboring form of help that inevitably comes to mind as an analogy if not a model. As Orenstein makes clear, it is entirely true that coaching is distinct from therapy, and the coach has to keep the distinction in mind. At the same time, effective coaching runs

up against similar problems and requires comparable skills at reading behavior and negotiating relationships that depend on openness and trust. Quick and superficial training, glib self-confidence, even a reasonably good track-record as a manager is not enough in knowing how to help another person and dealing with the pitfalls of understanding complex motivations.

Today, many are all too eager to earn the lucrative fees that are frequently paid for this work. As a result, the field is immensely diverse, unorganized, unregulated, and filled with well-intentioned practitioners with questionable and, frequently, superficial skills. As a psychoanalyst who frequently works in the business environment, I know that people bring their problems with them to work. Even top executives with successful records can have difficulty exercising calm and decisive judgment. Moreover, like the rest of us, they can often also have difficulty seeing clearly what they are up against. In this respect the world of work is just another part of the world we live in. And change is difficult. Fear is inevitably evoked and resistances are usually engaged. Yes, it might be easy to teach someone to organize his or her desk or convey useful tips in running a meeting—but often the problems are much deeper than that. How many coaches really understand that or are seriously prepared to look more deeply into their client's reactions? Pep talks are seldom enough.

Organizations, moreover, have little ability to know what they are getting for their money. And here is where Orenstein demonstrates her wisdom in yet another way, providing means of assessment. Not only does she appreciate the complexity of the issues to be encountered at work, she understands the ease with which practitioners and clients can be deceived into believing that they have accomplished more than they actually have. A client may never know the help he did not get. He or she may wonder about it or feel disappointed, but coaches who are all too eager to believe in their effectiveness can easily reassure them that they are doing “just great!” A lively and engaging personality can cover a multitude of sins, with clients ending up feeling that, once again, they simply lack the basic stuff needed to understand and overcome their problems.

Orenstein has built into her approach evaluative measures that guard against such collusions. Clients and the organizations that pay for services can get a read on how it worked and when it did not. The wise practitioner not only wants clients to understand and evaluate what they are getting, she wants to know herself, and she will search for means to find out.

Wisdom in this realm is all too hard to come by. But here it is, both for those who want to know where to find it, so they can use it, and for those who want to know how to acquire it.

Kenneth Eisold, PhD
Past President, International Society for
the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations

Preface

Shortly before beginning work on this book, the following three incidents occurred:

- I received a call from the human relations director of a well-known foundation. “I heard you speak at a recent convention,” she said, “and I need your advice. We are planning to provide executive coaching to our senior managers. There are so many people who call themselves ‘executive coaches’ that I am not sure what qualifications I should be looking for.”
- During a meeting concerning strategy for executive development at a Fortune 50 corporation, the company’s director of leadership development commented, “We have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on coaching over the course of the last five years. We have coaches who have been with us that long. And we still do not have a way to evaluate the cost effectiveness of the money we are spending.”
- Asked to teach a doctoral-level course on executive coaching at a major university, I searched the literature for relevant intellectual material. I was forced to conclude that nothing appropriate existed in the current public domain.

The need for documenting a disciplined, theory-based approach for the effective practice of executive coaching has been made evident to me by these and a myriad of other incidents. This book is my attempt to address that need by presenting the conceptual framework for the practice of and the practical considerations regarding an approach I have named (hopefully aptly) “multi-dimensional executive coaching.”

The book is composed of five parts. Part I is the foundational material. The first chapter, which serves as a reference point for ensuing chapters, is an in-depth case history. The second chapter defines executive coaching and examines the current state of the field. It includes a literature review as well as reasons for the explosive growth in the practice. The third chapter explicates the guiding theory, with particular emphasis on the following: the psychological determinants of individual behavior; role theory; the impact of

conscious and unconscious organizational forces on individual behavior; the group-as-a-whole phenomenon and its influence on the individual; embedded intergroup relations and the unconscious effects of identity and organizational group memberships; and the concept of the consultant's use of self as tool, including how rigorous self-reflection by the executive coach informs the entire executive coaching process.

Part II describes the actual practice of executive coaching based on the guiding theory presented in Part I. It explains the process in its entirety, from initial contact through termination, and makes extensive use of examples from, and analyses of, actual case histories. Phase I, "Entry," discusses the initial contact with the organization, the first meeting with the client, the formulation of the preliminary coaching plan, and the executive coaching contract, as well as the crucial data that can be gleaned about the organization and the client from these first contacts. Phase II, "Facilitating Change," is the heart of the coaching process. "Assessment" presents four methods for assessing behavior: the unstructured interview with the client; semistructured, qualitative 360-degree interviews; unstructured observation; and the coach's use of self. Analysis of the data, including attention to reliability and validity, is also thoroughly discussed. "Feedback," the next chapter, encompasses the process of giving feedback to the client (both orally and in written form) in a way that the client can best absorb it. It also explains how feedback is given from the perspective of multi-level forces impacting the perceptions of the client's behavior. "Objectives Setting" discusses the formulation of specific coaching objectives based on the feedback, both individually with the client and then in a joint meeting with the manager to whom the client reports—and the rich data that can be illuminated from such a meeting. "Formal Coaching" describes the one-on-one work with the client to achieve the stated objectives. The chapter includes a guide for conducting coaching meetings, a compendium of coaching techniques, and a range of examples that demonstrate the depth and breadth of coaching interventions that must be in the coach's repertoire and the factors that must be considered when using each one.

In Phase III, "Concluding Coaching," the topic of outcome evaluation (which, at the time of this writing, is still conspicuous by its absence in executive coaching literature) is discussed. The chapter includes specific, practical, and statistically sound methods for evaluating the effectiveness of coaching. Techniques for concluding the coaching process are examined in the following chapter.

Part III of the book, "Practical Considerations," considers two broad areas—potential coaching failures (i.e., when to decline or exit a coaching assignment) and implications for practice, including the education and training of executive coaches and ethical dilemmas in the field.

Part IV, the final section, summarizes and then uses the concepts and techniques discussed throughout the book in a detailed analysis of the case history presented in the first chapter. As further aids for the reader, there are appendices with sample documents relevant for practice and annotated bibliographies at the conclusion of each chapter for further reading and investigation.

Twelve years ago, I took the ultimate professional leap of faith when, midcareer, I abandoned the executive suite to return to the classroom full time. My purpose was to equip myself with the knowledge and skill to alleviate the debilitating psychological pain I both witnessed and experienced throughout the workplace. It is my fervent hope that this book will be used as a vehicle to expand the knowledge and skill base for those who wish to do the same. It is offered to the reader in that spirit.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank the two people most impacted by my decision to write this book. I thank Tony Gabriel, the love of my life, for reminding me of the reasons for continuing to write at those times when I was all too ready to forget them, and for his caring and patient support throughout the effort. And I thank Vicki Lincoln, my business partner and “soul sister,” for always being there to share in the frustrations and the successes and always knowing the right thing to say and do, professionally and personally.

This book would not have been possible without the education and training I received in the organizational psychology program at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University. I am indebted to Clayton P. Alderfer, Kenwyn Smith (at the University of Pennsylvania), Karen Riggs Skean, and Nancy Fagley for introducing me to ways of thinking that deeply influence the way in which I work; to Cary Cherniss and Lew Gantwerk for continually encouraging expansion of the work; and to my friends and colleagues throughout my studies, particularly Andrew Simon and Michele Ballet, both of whom conscientiously read and commented on the first draft of the manuscript.

Sheri W. Sussman, my editor at Springer Publishing Company, has been the epitome of kindness, open-mindedness, and professionalism. I would also like to thank Mary Ann McLaughlin, Alana Stein, and Mimi Flow, also at Springer, for their support. Stanley Wakefield, the agent who recognized the potential contribution of this book, can certainly be considered the “prime mover” in all of this, and I thank him for his guidance and persistence in the earliest of stages. In later stages, my aunt, Edythe Sheinbaum, lovingly and tirelessly put her remarkable proofreading skills to work for me; I thank her for her commitment to excellence.

I am deeply grateful to Ken Eisold for writing the foreword. His generosity of spirit is second only to his stature in the field, and I am honored by his endorsement of my work.

Finally, I would like to thank the group of men and women who must remain nameless but without whom there would have been nothing to

write—my clients. My clients have been my perpetual inspiration, and I feel fortunate, indeed, to have been allowed to enter their worlds and entrusted with what has often been their most intimate feelings and thoughts. I am especially grateful to those clients who so willingly and enthusiastically allowed me to share their experiences in the case histories that appear in this book.

PART I

Multidimensional Executive Coaching: Foundations

It is the very success of a developing profession that brings on demands for inquiry of that profession.

—Chris Argyris (1975)

CHAPTER 1

Multidimensional Executive Coaching in Action: The Case of Margaret¹

As I drove through the heavy iron gates and started up the long, curving driveway, I felt a sense of excited anticipation. I was about to meet a new client—a prominent researcher who had the potential of influencing national policy in her area. She had recently been promoted to head a high-profile unit in the highly regarded research division of a well-known corporation in the Northeast. The initial request to meet with her had come from her supervising manager, Steve, the president of the division, with whom I had previously worked. “She needs your help,” he had said. Then he added, “And she will probably prove to be the most intellectually stimulating of all your assignments.”

I entered the main building, a renovated mansion on an estate that had been converted to the research division’s headquarters. I followed the directions she had given me to her office. After several wrong turns, I came across a group of cubicles. They were occupied by women with their heads down, so I politely interrupted the work of one to ask where I could find Margaret’s office. Without raising her head, she pointed to the back. The glass door was closed and I knocked. Margaret motioned me in, and I smiled and introduced myself. She readily returned the smile and invited me to sit in one of the chairs facing where she sat behind her desk. There were boxes and piles of paper throughout the room. Her desk was covered with paper.

As I walked to the chair, I was struck by a feeling of great relief. In that moment, I realized that while wandering the mansion’s halls for what seemed like an interminably long time, I had had a growing sense of being a character in a gothic novel about to stumble upon some dark secret in a hidden passageway. When I had

¹ The only changes in this case are those made for the purpose of ensuring the confidentiality of the client and the client’s organization.

at last found the correct area, its somber, impassive inhabitants, and Margaret in her cluttered office, it was as if she were hidden in the attic, grateful that someone had come to rescue her.

As soon as I sat, she said, "I am so happy you are here. I can't believe that someone is going to help me." She then said she felt completely overwhelmed. She described the unit and her work in detail and talked at length about her concerns. The first was the organization of the unit. She was eager to structure it in the way that was "most sensible to operate" but did not know what that was. Its current structure had evolved as the result of an interpersonal conflict between the two people who reported directly to her: her administrative manager, Veronica, and her research manager, Brian. She described Brian as a "no-nonsense" person who got things done and was highly effective running multiple projects, and Veronica as a highly talented but temperamental administrator. She explained that her relationship with Veronica had greatly deteriorated and handed me a letter that Veronica had recently written, enumerating her frustrations with Margaret and the unit.

I took a few moments to read the letter and was shocked by its belligerent and condescending tone. "Have you addressed any of these issues with her?" I asked. "No, she is just so angry at me," Margaret said apologetically.

Before I could ask her for more detail, she turned to another concern. She told me that she had believed that being housed in the main research building, thereby having to rely on the divisional infrastructure, had been a great disadvantage because of her relationship with the former vice president of research, Joseph, who had been in his position for 12 years. Now that he had been promoted to executive vice president and was in a different location, she was more optimistic. She described herself as being "afraid" of Joseph because he was always angry at her. When I asked her what he was angry about, she shuddered and said, "I don't know. Everything."

Margaret next informed me that she and the current research vice president already had a strong bond as the only biologists in the interdisciplinary research division and the only women on the senior management team. She was hopeful that their alliance would aid her in overcoming both the rigidity of divisional administration and the misgivings of her peers, physicians and neuropsychologists uncertain of the value of her new unit. She believed that if she could ameliorate these tensions, her unit would figure prominently in the growing prestige of the division. She reported that, in addition to her position as unit director, she taught two advanced seminars at an affiliated medical school.

The fact that she now had little time to engage in her own research was a source of considerable frustration, although Steve had told her that the unit would be her research laboratory. She stated that her goals for the coaching were to organize the unit appropriately, to develop her organizational

leadership skills (including motivation, delegation, and “administrative savvy”), and to carve out time for strategic work.

She listened attentively to my explanation of the coaching process. When I gave her the choice of waiting for the results of feedback interviews that would provide a composite of how she was perceived or, in view of her objectives, beginning the one-on-one coaching simultaneously, she reiterated her desire to start work immediately. Consequently, we agreed that an initial objectives-setting session with Steve would be helpful.

As I left the building, I realized how much I already liked Margaret. She was warm and engaging, and I was impressed with how open and willing to ask for help she had been. There was not the slightest bit of pretentiousness nor arrogance about her. As a result, I found her evident disorganization somewhat endearing. I was, however, quite perplexed by her fear of others' anger, which had the effect of transforming a self-reliant and accomplished professional into a bewildered and vulnerable innocent. It appeared to make no sense given her reputation and stature not only within the company but in the industry at large.

Steve was the first to speak at the meeting. He stated that he wanted Margaret to be an effective, efficient, and happy manager. He explained that he hoped she could become comfortable with directing and planning research rather than doing it herself and that, to do so, she needed to delegate and utilize people better. He told her that she had the reputation of being an “emotional” manager and emphasized that she needed to learn how to get the best from imperfect people—like Veronica and even Joseph. As soon as Steve mentioned Joseph, Margaret’s relaxed attentiveness vanished. She leaned forward, her face flushed. “Are you saying that you think I am at fault for the problems with Joseph? Is that why Ruth is working with me?” she demanded. Steve, slightly taken aback but without changing his tone, explained that this was not the case, but that he had been concerned she would perceive it that way and had thought about having another coach work with Joseph. That calmed Margaret, and Steve continued. He stated that he hoped Margaret would learn how to do more “behind the scenes politicking” in order to make things happen. At that point, Margaret became visibly angry. She informed Steve that she was extremely savvy politically and recounted the many ways in which she had gotten things done in the division by utilizing that savvy. Steve looked stunned. “I had no idea,” he stammered. “I apologize. Please accept my belated gratitude for your heretofore unrecognized contributions.”

As Margaret and I left, she asked me if she had been too forceful. I told her that I did not believe she had done any damage to herself and, in fact, probably had heightened Steve’s respect for her. She then told me that she believed Joseph had intentionally withheld the information about her contributions in an attempt to discredit her.

I had seen another side of Margaret in this meeting. I had been surprised by the intensity of her reactions and the degree to which she viewed Joseph as an enemy. I hypothesized that Joseph was the recipient of such strong projections because he represented parts of herself that she did not want to see. I made a mental note to explore that in later meetings. As I soon discovered, however, her responses were caused by circumstances of a very different nature.

When Margaret and I met next, I had conducted more than half of the feedback interviews with her staff and peers. I was therefore equipped to bring a more informed perspective to the issue that Margaret raised—what to do about Veronica. Margaret reported that things were becoming quite unbearable, and that Veronica was affecting the rest of the staff and had publicly announced that she was seeking opportunities elsewhere in the corporation. I asked Margaret if she had confronted Veronica with the unacceptability of her behavior. When she said she had not, I asked why she was allowing Veronica to intimidate her so. Margaret again stated that it was because Veronica was so angry at her.

“Here is the opportunity!” I thought to myself. Aloud I asked, “Margaret, have there been other situations in which you have had a similar reaction?”

“Well, there was this medical student who angrily accused me of being racist and sexist in a seminar I was conducting. It was horrible. It ruined the rest of the seminar for me.”

“And has it happened in any other settings?”

Margaret was silent for a moment. “Well, there was my father,” she quietly said. She explained that her father had had outbursts of anger throughout her childhood and adolescence. She recounted an incident in which her father had gotten angry at her when she was home for Thanksgiving during her freshman year in college—he had driven her to the airport, paid for a plane ticket back to school, put her on the plane, and had given her no money. When she landed, there was no one to call and no means of transportation. She stated that she was the one who was always blamed for her father’s outbursts, so if her brothers or her mother were the recipients of his rage, it was Margaret’s fault. As a result, she tried, usually unsuccessfully, not to do anything to anger him. Her escape was to focus on her studies.

Margaret stopped and looked at me in amazement. “I never realized that this was affecting me at work!”

While Margaret was telling me her story, she appeared impassive, relating the details in a composed, perfunctory fashion. I, on the other hand, was having a strong emotional reaction. I felt outraged and protective. When she finished, I said nothing for a few moments. Then, the words came instinctively.

“We can talk about ways in which you might handle what you’ve just discovered. But this has been a major insight, and, for now, it might be best just to absorb it.”

Margaret agreed. I asked if she was all right. She assured me that she was. We arranged to meet again one week later.

I left the building, walked to my car, rested my head on the steering wheel, and cried. As I drove back to my office, I considered that Margaret might wonder whether her disclosure was appropriate. I concluded that it would be an opportune time to review the boundaries between coaching and therapy and to reassure her that what she had shared was entirely acceptable—and safe—within the confines of the coaching relationship.

Margaret plunged directly into a discussion of her need to communicate better when we met the following week. As the entire interview process now was almost complete, I was able to corroborate that this was a perception about her that others also held. We spoke about the need for staff meetings and how to elevate their content as well as the need for clear communication of expectations. Margaret, having thought about it, cited several examples of how her lack of clarity had caused misunderstandings with her staff.

As the meeting neared completion, I readied myself to bring up the previous session. Before I had the opportunity, Margaret did it for me. She informed me that she had been in therapy and had dealt with her family history in relation to her personal life, but that she was astonished that her behavior at work was also affected. I assured her that it would be unusual if it were not, and that it was a courageous and important step for her to tell me about the more painful aspects of her history. “It’s like having an elephant in the room,” I said. “If we don’t know it’s there, we’ll keep tripping over it. The difference between our work and therapy is that we’ll figure out ways to walk around the elephant; therapy is the process to use if you want it out of the room—or at least want to reduce its size.” That explanation appeared to make perfect sense to Margaret.

I left the meeting relieved that Margaret was comfortable both with her disclosure and my explanation. I was quite pleased with my analogy, particularly because it had come to me so spontaneously.

When we met again, Margaret announced, “I feel ready to speak with Veronica. I’d like your help in preparing for it.” Our meeting centered on the most effective manner in which to confront the unacceptable behaviors and communicate clear expectations while maintaining Veronica’s self-esteem. My interviews were now almost completed, and a pattern was emerging regarding the perception of Margaret’s strengths and developmental needs. In this case, it seemed particularly appropriate to leverage her strengths, which included her genuineness, her kindness, her ability to listen, and her willingness to set high standards for herself and others. In structuring the discussion, a key factor was the fact that their relationship, when it began, had been productive and mutually supportive. Margaret said she would continue to prepare and asked that I sit in on the discussion. I said I would do so if Veronica gave her consent.

Margaret decided to bring up the topic at the end of her regular weekly meeting with Veronica. I arrived at the beginning of that meeting; Margaret, as we had agreed, explained that I was sitting in for two reasons—to observe her interaction with Veronica and to make certain that Margaret was hearing what Veronica had to say. She asked Veronica if she had any objection, and Veronica indicated that she had already shared many of her concerns with me during the individual interview, so it was fine with her. The first part of the meeting consisted of a status report and calendar update. Veronica took the leadership role. Her tone was authoritative. Margaret then introduced the topic of their relationship. She began by telling Veronica how productive their relationship had been at the beginning and gave her specific examples of what had made it so effective. She then expressed regret that it had deteriorated so badly. She stated that she would support Veronica in her search for a job elsewhere in the company, but while she was still part of the research unit, there were a number of things that were expected of her. Margaret then stated what those expectations were and the ways in which Veronica's current behavior was not acceptable. Margaret was poised, professional, and even throughout. She was firm without being harsh. Veronica sat and listened without saying a word. When Margaret was finished, she asked Veronica how she felt about what had just been said. Veronica burst into tears and left the room. Margaret looked at me for help. I told her that she could not have handled the situation more effectively. A few moments later, Veronica returned and apologized for leaving. She turned to Margaret and talked about how difficult it was to do her job with Margaret so busy and on the road so frequently, how she constantly tried to hold things together and felt as though she failed, and how unappreciated she felt. Her tone was sincere and respectful. Margaret told her how sorry she was to have placed such a burden on Veronica and asked her to think about what support she needed to do her job.

When Veronica left the room, I asked Margaret how she felt about what had just happened. Margaret was pleased. She told me that she had prepared her comments in the same way that she prepared for a professional presentation about her research findings. She had thought about what she wanted to communicate, had organized her thoughts, and had followed the plan. I encouraged her to follow that process any time she planned to have a discussion with an employee, particularly if confronting a difficult subject and especially if she was concerned that the employee might become angry.

As I left Margaret's office, I passed Veronica's desk. I told her how courageous she was for returning to the room and finishing the discussion. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you for everything."

I could not decide who was more pleased with what had transpired—Margaret or I. I was amazed by what I had seen and felt grateful to be engaged in this work.

The following week, Margaret happily reported that there had been a dramatic positive change in Veronica's behavior. She then reported that there had been a spillover to her home environment—she had used the same technique with her teenaged son, and it had been equally effective. She explained that she had been a “dirty fighter” at home, and, although she was willing to admit when she was wrong, she had always suspected that there was a better way. She felt she had now discovered it and wished she had been able to use it when her children were younger. We talked about the relevance of establishing clear boundaries, and the rest of the session was devoted to how she could continue to define and communicate expectations with the rest of her staff.

Because of Margaret's travel schedule, it was 3 weeks before we met again. She reported progress in all areas. The relationship with Veronica had returned to the way it had been at the beginning, she had confronted an issue with a research supervisor, and she was preparing to discuss a problem with Brian. She also had thought through a new organizational structure—one that would give Veronica more support, require Veronica and Brian to collaborate, and provide a link to the divisional infrastructure. She decided to hold her first monthly staff meeting the following week, and we went over the agenda together. She asked me whether I thought it would be a good idea to invite the division staff that supported her group, and I told her that was an excellent idea. Toward the end of the session, she reported that, despite all of this progress, she continued to feel overwhelmed. I suggested that she keep a daily log of all of her activities so that we could identify those tasks that could either be delegated or eliminated. She said she thought that was a great idea and then paused and said, with trepidation in her voice, “But eliminating makes me nervous. Can I eliminate and still be successful?” I reminded her that all she was doing at this stage was attempting to identify the tasks. Making decisions about them would come later—and, even then, she would be the judge of priorities. That appeared to satisfy her.

Once again, I was startled. I would have understood, and even anticipated, a reluctance to eliminate commitments based on Margaret's drive and high standards for achievement. But fear was something quite unexpected. Did she not know that she was considered a superstar in her field and indispensable to the company? Did she not recognize her stature and feel secure about her position? A “need to believe in herself” had come up in the feedback interviews. I had assumed it referred to her decision making; perhaps it also applied here. I noted her reaction (and my own) so that we could return to it at a later time.

Her staff meeting, to which I had been invited, was a huge success. Her presentation of goals was inspirational, her explanation of the new organizational structure was explicit, and her demeanor was engaging and participative. When it concluded, I walked to her office to congratulate her. A group

had gathered in the outer office to express how much they had enjoyed and learned from the meeting. Margaret was glowing when I left.

We had postponed the feedback session to wait for an interview with a former supervising manager whose heavy travel schedule had not permitted an earlier meeting with me. When he returned, the interview had to be postponed. Margaret and I decided not to wait any longer. Margaret listened with interest as I described what I had learned about the organizational context, including the research center, the division, and the corporation as a whole. She was fascinated by the varied, and sometimes contradictory, descriptions of her role. She was visibly uncomfortable with the long list of her strengths. When we got to the areas for improvement, none of it was a surprise, as we had already begun to address the most significant areas. It thus served to confirm her objectives.

As the meeting was concluding, she again talked about how overwhelmed she was feeling. I asked if she had kept the log, and she said she had started it but could not continue. I asked if she could isolate anything specific that was making her feel so overburdened. She talked about the pressures of having to please the physicians and the neurosurgeons. I asked her what she thought would happen if she said no to some of the requests they made. She shuddered. Observing her reaction and remembering her purported lack of confidence in herself, I gave her a special assignment in addition to the log—to identify and acknowledge those things about herself of which she was most proud. I also told her that I would send her the written summary of the feedback prior to our next meeting and asked her to review the list of strengths daily as a reminder of the admiration and respect that others had for her. I concluded by saying, “Margaret, you are a ‘star’—I heard that over and over again in the interviews. You have already proved yourself. It is all right to turn some things away.” She smiled weakly, and I left.

Our next meeting was two weeks later. I had hoped to introduce the subject of positive reinforcement and reward, the only item in the feedback that we had not yet examined in depth. Margaret seemed unusually distracted when I arrived. She did not greet me with her usual warm hello. Instead, she said, “I am still completely overwhelmed!” When I asked her if she had any sense of why, she emphatically stated it was because she had so much to do and had to do all of it well. “So what I’m hearing you say is that you can’t say no to anything and that it all has to be A+ effort.” She said, with unmistakable defiance in her voice, that that was essentially the case. I asked her why, and she answered, with obvious annoyance, “We went through that last time. I really don’t feel as though I am in a position to say no.”

This was the first time I was aware of encountering resistance from Margaret. Why, after all of this time, all that she had shared with me, and all that she had been willing to undertake, was this happening now?

I then asked her if she had reviewed the list of strengths. She reacted sharply: “I am really very uncomfortable doing that. I admire humility, and I want to continue to be humble. And I wish you would stop calling me a ‘star.’”

I was taken aback by Margaret’s words and the passion with which she said them. It took a moment to recover.

“Margaret, what is this all about?” I quietly asked.

Margaret was intense but calm as she responded to my question: “When I was 5 years old, I played in violin competitions. I had to win. I had to be my mother’s ‘star.’ So I won every competition. But my mother also always told me, ‘Pride cometh before the fall,’ so I wouldn’t get arrogant about my winning. I always felt like such a bad person because I could never be anyone’s friend; they were my competitors, and I had to beat them. I have heard ‘Pride cometh before the fall’ my whole life. Any time things have gone really well and then something awful happened, I felt that it was my punishment.” Margaret talked about how she discovered herself at 15, when she spent a summer away from home studying music, and realized that she was not as talented as many others. Being there had shown her a different life, and it had had a strong impact. “My mother brought me up to be a ‘Boston Brahmin,’” she continued. “As soon as I could, I left home and moved to Southern California. I married a Silicon Valley executive, started giving dinner parties, had my children, and one day woke up and realized I was a Californian ‘Boston Brahmin.’ I got divorced and went back to school. Those were hard years as a single parent and a full-time student, but I did it. I had this really nice boyfriend for a while. He jilted me, and I was crushed ... I kept thinking, ‘Pride cometh before the fall.’” She was then silent, appearing to be lost in thought.

As Margaret had spoken, I found it increasingly more difficult to fight my tears. My mother had been a child prodigy who had renounced the piano when she was 14 because she hated to perform. I grew up hearing about those painful years from my mother and my grandmother. My nephew had just turned four, and I imagined him sitting at a piano, his little fingers at the keys hour after hour. I imagined Margaret as a child, having to win. I felt as though my heart were breaking for her.

After several minutes, she looked at me and said that even though she knew that her mother had made many mistakes, she believed her mother tried her best.

I realized Margaret had had enough, so I said that most parents try to do what they think is best, but sometimes they cannot tell the difference between what is right for them and what is right for their children. What was important for our work was to discover the ways in which these experiences were inhibiting her from being effective professionally. I suggested that we end the session and that she think about it until the next time we met. I checked to

see that she was as composed as she appeared; she was. I reminded her that she could call me if she needed me, and I left.

Once again, I got to my car, put my head on the steering wheel, and allowed my tears to flow for her. She had been through so much in her life, had overcome so much, and I was concerned that I had pushed her too far too fast. I felt inadequate to deal with these issues, and I wondered if I should recommend that she reenter therapy before continuing with our work.

I came to the next meeting with some trepidation. I was prepared to make the recommendation that she return to therapy. When I arrived, she greeted me cordially. Before I could say anything, she told me that she was preparing to confront an issue with Brian and was confident that she could handle it. She also told me that she had had another staff meeting and was very pleased with the outcome. She had used it as an opportunity to give praise and recognition to her staff and had seen their positive responses. She then reported that she had thought about “the competition issue” and had practiced doing an “adequate” rather than an “exceptional” job at a recent professional convention. She said that it felt good not to have to “perform” and that the reception had been fine.

I was astonished. Margaret had already begun to integrate her painful insight. My admiration and esteem for her was immeasurable.

She paused briefly and then smiled at me as she said, “You called me a ‘star.’ That was the trigger for what came up. Now that I know that anger, especially male anger, reminds me of my father, and having to perform reminds me of my mother, I can deal with it.”

I said to Margaret, “You are a remarkable person.” She smiled warmly. There was nothing more to say. We agreed to wait a month before the next session.

I left convinced that we had reached our objectives; at this point, Margaret needed only reinforcement.

The next session revealed some of the old behavior patterns. Margaret was irritated with Brian but had not spoken to him because she was afraid he would quit. In addition, Margaret was again feeling overburdened. After some brief discussion, Margaret decided to resolve the difficulty with Brian by affirming her great confidence in him and then explaining that there was just one area in which he could improve his performance. She also decided to meet with the heads of the other research departments to discuss priorities and necessary resources. She was confident about her ability to have all of these conversations, and we agreed to wait another month.

Margaret began that session by reporting that she was beginning to feel overwhelmed again. This time, it was because she felt that she did not have anyone to whom to delegate the more complex aspects of the biological research. In addition, her husband was urging her to stop working so hard on

weekends and engage in more leisure activities with him. I asked her if it was likely that she would keep the current research staff intact, and she responded with an emphatic yes. I then asked what her alternatives were. She thought for a moment and announced that she did have money in her budget but that she had been hoarding it because she was worried about possible budget cuts. She took a deep breath and added, "But perhaps now is the time to stop acting toward the unit the way I operated struggling through graduate school as a single parent with young children." She determined that she would hire more people with expertise in the required area. I congratulated her. Aside from this matter, she felt that everything else was under control, including her ability to choose when and how to deal with employee issues as they arose. As the meeting drew to a close, I told Margaret that it sounded as if our work were done. She panicked and pleaded for one more session. I told her I did not really think she needed it but that I would be happy to have another session. We agree to wait 2 months before meeting, unless she had the need to speak to me sooner.

When I arrived at our final session, Margaret said she was pleased to see me but did not have anything to talk about. I told her how delighted I was to hear that. She told me that she had gained an enormous amount from the coaching, had a unit that was operating well with happy people in it, and was still busy but no longer overwhelmed. She said she had learned how important it is to establish clear expectations with people and communicate when the expectations were not being met—both with her own staff and with colleagues. She also said she had never understood the importance of recognition for others until now. Finally, she said she realized that when people are angry, it may not be directed against her—maybe not even in the case of her father's anger—and while it would always be hard for her, she could now deal with it more effectively. The only question she had was whether we should meet with Steve to find out if he felt that the objectives had been met. I told her we could certainly do that, but it was my understanding that he had already indicated to her that he saw the positive changes. She agreed that he had repeatedly demonstrated his growing confidence in her, so she did not think it was necessary for that purpose but explained that what she really wanted to do was make sure that she was counteracting all the negative things she was certain Joseph was continuing to say about her. I asked her why she thought Joseph had such omnipotence, and she responded by saying that Joseph could be president some day and make life miserable for her. "Margaret, I think it's time for you to invite Joseph out to lunch and make peace with him," I said. She recoiled and told me she was not ready to do that. I told her that if she wasn't ready, that was all right, but it was the one remaining thing that needed to be confronted. She said that she would do it in time, but not yet. "Think of

it as your last homework assignment with a due date that is self-imposed,” I said. She nodded and smiled, and I smiled back.

I told her how much I had enjoyed working with her and that she could feel free to call me if she needed me—and that doing so did not mean she was failing. She thanked me, and we said good-bye.

As I left, I thought about how much she had accomplished, how privileged I felt to be a part of her process, and how much I would miss her.

This dramatic and compelling case exemplifies the executive coaching process presented in this book. To the uninitiated, there will be a temptation to explain the change in Margaret simplistically: Two insights about the impact of her childhood experience caused her to reassess her circumstances at work and enabled her to change her behavior. While not incorrect, such an analysis stays at only the most superficial of levels² and fails to recognize the central themes inherent in the case:

1. That executive coaching is a complex and demanding process encompassing multidimensional interrelationships among the client, the client’s organization, and the consultant.
2. That there must be a reliable methodological framework within which to do the work of executive coaching.
3. That the executive coaching methodology must be guided by theory comprising not only individuals but also organizations and groups.
4. That the consultant doing executive coaching must have (a) training and expertise in management, organizational psychology, and individual psychology; (b) a full knowledge of ethical standards and guidelines related to the field; and (c) the demonstrated capacity to engage in self-scrutiny and self-reflection.

These are also the central themes of this book. They will appear repeatedly in the chapters that follow.

²The full case analysis is the content of the last chapter of this book, presented there as an encapsulation of all the material that precedes it.