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Making the Most of Defining Moments at EY

A defining moment, such as a promotion to a leadership role, an overseas assignment or the birth of a child, is an opportunity to discover your unique strengths and an invitation to unlock your full potential. However, you shouldn't have to do this on your own.

This is a core belief that informs the approach to talent development at EY (formerly Ernst and Young), one of the largest professional services organizations in the world and one of the "Big Four." With the vision of developing better leaders, faster, EY has invested in building a robust coaching culture across its global enterprise. From its initial roots as a key pillar of the organization's career development framework to a global investment in established and emerging leaders, coaching at EY is now recognized as the key talent differentiator internally and within the marketplace.

In recognition of EY's global coaching offering, the International Coach Federation (ICF) recognized the organization with an honorable mention for the 2017 ICF International Prism Award. The Prism Award program honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, fulfill rigorous professional standards, address key strategic goals, and shape organizational culture. (Learn more at Coachfederation.org/prism.)

A Game-changing Approach

Coaching at EY is delivered formally and integrated informally as a key part of the culture. Formal coaching is designed to give leaders the clarity they need when they need it most. By making coaching part of the fabric of the organization, leaders are supported during defining moments to make their leadership experience exceptional and accelerate their impact and capabilities.

One defining moment that EY has invested coaching resources in is new parenthood. As of September 2016, more than 700 EY employees (25 percent of whom were men) had taken advantage of coaching for new parents. Gerald Whelan, an EY tax partner who took advantage of the opportunity as he prepared to become a first-time father to twins, told *The Wall Street Journal* that partnering

with an internal coach practitioner helped prepare him for working parenthood by exploring topics including how to communicate about his impending parental leave in a way that would set the tone for his team (i.e., making it clear that he was taking paternity leave instead of vacation).

For individuals stepping into new roles, such as newly promoted partners, coaching is a powerful driver for talent development and retention. In a recent survey of leaders who received transition coaching, the following engagement indicators were a direct result of the coaching engagement: 96 percent understood what drives them, 89 percent were clearer about their role and responsibilities, 80 percent more confidently navigated their environment, 83 percent identified and built the relationships that matter to their success, 80 found their footing faster, and 88 percent felt stronger as a leader.

Additional findings from qualitative and quantitative surveys of newly promoted leaders saw that 89 percent improved their leadership brand and 94 percent would recommend coaching. The data indicated these leaders developed new habits around time management, are more self-reflective and engaged, clarified role expectations, converted goals to actions, worked through challenges, developed self-awareness, improved listening and communication skills, and created strategies for managing stress. Lastly, these leaders said others experienced them as having an elevated level of executive presence due to being calmer and clear.

"The people that are experiencing coaching across our organization are calling it 'game-changing,'" says Janice Smith, PCC, global director of EY's Leadership and Team Coaching Practice. "Whatever we invest in, we know that if we back it with coaching, we're going to get a greater return on that investment."

Building Better Teams

One area where EY has invested significant coaching resources is the development of the highest-performing teams (HPT). "HPT is leadership and team coaching work that accelerates the success of our key working unit, the account team," explains nominating coach Tricia Christian, ACC. Based on the teaming methodology of Patrick Lencioni, EY has a high-touch model that incorporates coaching, consulting and facilitation. The HPT practitioner logs 50–60 hours with the leader and team as they gain awareness of their current teaming behaviors and begin

making changes. This is achieved through one-on-one coaching for the leader and team coaching over a period of six to 18 months. Team members across the globe also have access to self-service coaching tools and resources to own the process of taking their team to the next level.

Data from coaching engagements with high-profile account teams showed direct impact on top- and bottom-line results. These include an average of 31 percent revenue growth, 109 percent increase in total contract values, leadership promotions attributed to the growth of the team, increase in growth projections, and attainment of preferred provider status and leading-class reputation, which resulted in attracting top-notch talent.

The relationship between coaching and building the highest-performing teams is straightforward, Smith says. “When we coach the leader in the context of their team, they get better and their team gets better.”

An Emphasis on Excellence

EY utilizes a combination of part- and full-time internal coach practitioners and external coach practitioners. External coaches must hold an ICF Credential and complete an extensive approval process. Internal coach practitioners must hold an ICF Credential or a relevant advanced degree combined with the required years of experience. Requirements and expectations for part-time internal coaches vary by region and country, but ICF Credentials are the target marker for professional acumen across the global coaching practice.

All internal coach practitioners are included in a coaching community of practice that provides mentoring, networking, knowledge-sharing and ongoing skill development. The community of practice hosts coaching conferences approximately every two years for more advanced skill

development. Internal coach practitioners also advance their professional development by participating in supervision circles; Smith says that many EY coaches cite this offering as the greatest benefit available to coaches in the organization.

Driving Lasting Change

Since implementing coaching, EY has shifted its sales process to a relationship-centric model that closely resembles a coaching partnership: The agenda for meetings is completely driven by the client, communications are based on inquiry, and the goal is to establish a high-trust, safe and professionally intimate relationship. Similarly, EY has overhauled its executive-level performance management process; the new process reflects the adoption of a coaching approach. Whereas the prior model emphasized quantitative measurement and feedback on past actions, the new model emphasizes high-quality conversation, reflection, and learning from the past to plan for the future.

“Coaching now underpins everything we do at EY,” Christian says. “Our organization’s tagline espouses the essence of how asking better questions creates better answers, and thus a better working world. This represents a fundamental shift in how our people do business, from a cultural expectation of showing up as experts who advise and tell, to listeners who ask questions and demonstrate curiosity.”

The International Coach Federation (ICF) is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches across a variety of coaching disciplines. ICF is active in representing all facets of the coaching industry, including Executive, Life Vision and Enhancement, Leadership, Relationship, and Career Coaching. Its 26,000-plus members located in more than 130 countries* work toward the common goal of enhancing awareness of coaching, upholding the integrity of the profession, and continually educating themselves with the newest research and practices.

**Numbers as of August 2017. Numbers are subject to change month to month.*



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