



# Coaching class

Linked intrinsically to heightened productivity, executive coaching practitioners and the companies that employ them are realising that maintaining happy employees means looking at their lives holistically

**S**omeone who's had personal experience of this insight is JP Sulon, Team and Executive Coach at Nedbank. A former company executive for customer systems, he wanted "more balance" in his life and more time with his family, so he traded his chances of sitting on the group's Exco and reinvented his career using what many consider a "softer" focus on coaching.

What's impressive is that the skill wasn't deemed at all "soft" by Nedbank, which oversees its wide-ranging, internal coaching programme at Exco level and has employed Sulon in a permanent capacity. More such positions are in the pipeline over the next few years.

Sulon explains that from a transformational point of view – bearing in mind the bad publicity that sometimes surrounds the BEE policies of South African companies and the fast-tracking of black employees – he was inspired to find a new, secure place for himself in the organisation. "Sometimes it's best to redefine your own role in the organisation for yourself," he says.

These are the kinds of transformational breakthroughs a solid executive coaching programme should hope to achieve. Sulon says it's in corporate SA's best interests to understand the broader concerns and challenges of their workers – and this includes their home lives and associated personal struggles.

"Troubles in employees' private lives will

inevitably show up at work," he says. And they'll inevitably impact the company's bottom line.

## MENTORING MANAGERS

More and more, executive coaching is emerging as an effective discipline in helping managers feel more fulfilled and therefore, contribute more meaningfully to their organisations. The strategies often focus on interpersonal skills and building loyalty in departments.

Nedbank's internal coaching programme has a three-tiered approach:

**Tier 1:** This involves line managers – who undergo a two-day training programme – coaching junior employees in basic areas of performance like managing their time.

**Tier 2:** This sees managers undergo a two- to six-month training programme with the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business's Centre for Coaching. These coaches work with mid- to senior-level managers around leadership style and motivation tactics. "At tier 2, coaches generally work with what I call 'doing' issues: 'How am I doing something and how could I do it differently?'" explains Sulon.

**Tier 3:** This is about "transformational coaching" at executive level, where the overriding idea is to deal with individuals' perspectives of the world and how they fit into it. Coaches at this level complete a comprehensive coaching training programme, which ultimately sees them



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## BUSINESS EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE



accredited with the International Coach Federation (ICF).

"At tier 3, coaches work more with 'being' stuff: who am I, what is my current narrative and what would I like my narrative to be?" says Sulon.

### BOOSTING THE BOTTOM LINE

It's impossible to accurately quantify the programme's monetary value, but Sulon says the company works on the premise that there's a link between the levels of work satisfaction and engagement that employees bring to the office and the levels of entropy in the organisation. "The assumption is that this must be having an effect on the bottom line," he says.

Joanne Solomon, Head of Marketing for Nedbank Corporate Property Finance (the division that first rolled out the coaching programme), is benefiting from tier 3 coaching – and loving it.

"It makes you far more aware of how you're interacting with your team. There's also a lot of scope for self-reflection and coming up with solutions for yourself through asking probing questions. What's more, the company pays for it as part of your development plan, but it goes beyond your work, addressing the full spectrum of changes you'd like to see in your life," she says.

### SHARPENING SKILLS

Landelahni also runs a very successful coaching programme and has been focusing on government officials of late to strengthen their emerging leadership capabilities. The company's CEO, Sandra Burmeister, says coaching is either on a one-on-one basis or through group coaching circles. The circles provide a forum for executives to explore a range of leadership and business issues and learn from each other and through the facilitator.

"One-on-one coaching is customised to the individual concerned. It's about sharpening skills that will assist the individual to achieve key business objectives," she says. Group coaching is more popular, however, because it's more cost-effective for companies.

She adds that Landelahni's "fast-tracking process" is particularly popular for building leadership capacity among people with scarce technical skills. Another innovative programme in "board coaching" is also quickly gaining ground for first-time board members.

Leah Banda, Group Head of Communications at ABC Holdings, who's currently completing an eight-month programme through Landelahni, says: "I play three major roles in my life – wife, mother and career woman – and coaching's helped

me directly and indirectly in all these spheres. I'm able to stop placing my expectations on others and be more objective. I'm also learning not to lose sight of my overall objectives and to step out of the details."

Burmeister says our increasingly interconnected world is continually throwing up new complexities that demand new leadership skills.

"Research shows that executive coaching delivers tangible business benefits such as better leadership, resulting in increased productivity and quality of work. It enhances organisational strength and improves customer service, resulting in reduced staff turnover and a contribution to bottom-line profitability," she says. ■

### USEFUL RESOURCES

- Local coaching firm Change Partners conducts team and in-house coaching where executives are trained to be internal coaching mentors for their organisations. Visit: [www.changepartners.co.za](http://www.changepartners.co.za)
- Success Factory is another great service for executive coaching. Business owner Elsabé Manning specialises in EQ and offers coaches training, as well as executive mentoring and team rebuilding. Visit: [www.successfactory.co.za](http://www.successfactory.co.za)
- The Centre for Coaching at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business offers in-house coaching programmes for businesses. Visit: [www.centreforcoaching.co.za](http://www.centreforcoaching.co.za)
- Read more about Landelahni's leadership development programme at: [www.landelahni.co.za](http://www.landelahni.co.za)
- To contact the local chapter of the ICF, visit: [www.icfgauteng.org](http://www.icfgauteng.org)
- Find a coach who offers one-on-one coaching at: [www.coachdirectory.co.za](http://www.coachdirectory.co.za)