



The Right Talent: Know That | Know How | Know Why  
"Be the Best Manager of Others and Team Player You Can Be"™

# “How to Choose A Business Coach?”

Maximizing the Value  
You Get from A Coaching Relationship



[www.The-Right-Talent.ca](http://www.The-Right-Talent.ca)

Roelf Woldring

[roelf@the-right-talent.ca](mailto:roelf@the-right-talent.ca)

1-416-427-1567

© 2017 - 2022

## Contents

Choosing the Right Business Coach .....	3
Why is this Important? .....	3
Cutting to the Chase: Is this the Right Business Coach for You? .....	3
Taking Responsibility for Your Side of the Coaching Relationship. ....	4
Core Coaching Competencies: The Power of 5 .....	5
1: Relevant Business Experience .....	5
The Degree of Needed Overlap .....	5
Measuring Business Coaching Success .....	6
2: Personal Emotional Maturity .....	6
Business Competencies and their Inner Core .....	7
1. Emotional Self-Awareness .....	7
2. Accurate Self Assessment .....	8
Business Coaches and Business Leaders .....	9
Being Emotional Self Aware and an Accurate Self Assessor are Required for Empathy at Work.....	10
3: Empathy .....	11
The Cognitive Side of Business Empathy .....	11
Thinking, Ideas and Feeling .....	11
Emotional Empathy in Business.....	12
Hunch, Dialogue, and Refine .....	13
4: Shareable Expertise .....	14
The Nature of Expertise .....	14
Sharing Expertise Effectively with a Person Being Coached .....	14
5: One-on-One Interpersonal Skill .....	16
Picking An Effective Business Coach .....	17
Why Bother? .....	19
About the author .....	21
4 decades of my work experience summed up.....	22

## Choosing the Right Business Coach ...

### Why is this Important?

Business coaching has become the norm. Scholarly researchers and industry practitioners write about its effectiveness. Individuals pay fees to become certified as coaches. Coaching associations have formed, each claiming unique insight on coaching effectiveness. Self-declared coaching experts draw anecdotal insights from sports coaching: professional, Olympic, and amateur, and apply them to personal and business coaching. All in all, there is lots of talk, but very little evidence-based insight on what really makes a business coach effective.

Self-declared business and leadership coaches tell you that all you have to do is do what they suggest and you will have a silver bullet approach to being more effective at work.

So how do you, the business executive looking for a coach, or the HR leader who is sponsoring a business coaching program for your organization, make sense of this often-contradictory advice? What things do you need to pay attention when you are trying to select an effective business coach?

### Cutting to the Chase: Is this the Right Business Coach for You?

Reading on will give you a clear understanding for what it takes for a self-declared coach to an effective business coach for you.

But all of that will not simplify the process of actually picking one. The **“Is this the right business coach for you?”** questionnaire summarizes what is said in the following pages, and puts it into a clear perspective.

“Is this person, whom you are considering, or who has been assigned to you by your organization, the most effective business coach for you?”

There is only one way to find out. Engage in a coaching session with the person. Then step back and work your way through the questionnaire. You may not be able to answer all of the questions. You may need another session the person. But you are doing the single most important thing that you can to improve the outcome of a coaching relationship. By being proactive about your side of relationship, you are dramatically its chances of being of value to you. The questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

## **Taking Responsibility for Your Side of the Coaching Relationship.**

The other thing you can do is read “The Coachee’s Guide”. You need to understand and take responsibility for your side of a coaching relationship. This short guide will help you do that.

## Core Coaching Competencies: The Power of 5

Fortunately, there is an answer for you. Grounded in decades of research on the nature of expertise, effective counselling / therapy relationships, and factors that facilitate adult learning / personal growth, this answer is summarized in the diagram above. Let's explore each of these 5 keys in turn.

### 1: Relevant Business Experience



To be effective, a business coach must have experience which is **relevant to the business situation of the person being coached**. One of the problems with many university programs and coaching association certification programs in coaching is that they ignore this fact. They claim that completing their coaching program equips a person to be a business coach, even a young person with relatively little business experience. It is simply not so. Without wide experience relevant to the business situation of the person being coached, graduates from such programs cannot provide advice tempered by experience. That experience must include making and recovering from past real business mistakes.

A business coach must rapidly understand the actual dynamics and the business issues faced by the person being coached. Without this relevant experience, a person acting as a business coach is reduced to working from generalizations and personal opinions. A business coach needs relevant experience and the strategic and tactical insight into what this will take in each coaching situation.

### The Degree of Needed Overlap

The business background of the coach and the person being coached do not need to be exactly the same. A degree of overlap in the scale and scope of is much more important. Former CEO's are most likely to be the best coaches for current CEO's. CEO coaches with both big and small enterprise experience are likely to be more flexible than coaches who have run only one size or the other. Successful entrepreneurs with start-up experience are the best coaches for budding entrepreneurs who are starting a new organization. Past CFO's who have been involved in mergers are the best coaches for CFO's getting involved in a merger. And so on ....

The broader the business experience of the business coach, the greater the number and variety of people they can effectively coach. Wide-ranging experience, in a range of

industries, at many different management levels, across both profit and non-profit organizations, is good indicator that a coach may have this needed experience. Because getting this range of experience takes years, older individuals are more likely to be effective business coaches than young ones.

## Measuring Business Coaching Success

Unlike personal development coaching or therapy, business coaching is a working relationship between two individuals where a successful outcome is relatively easy to measure. Since a business coach's goal is the increase the short-term and long-term results delivery of the person being coached, the metrics are obvious. Simply look for evidence of increased results delivery by the person being coached.

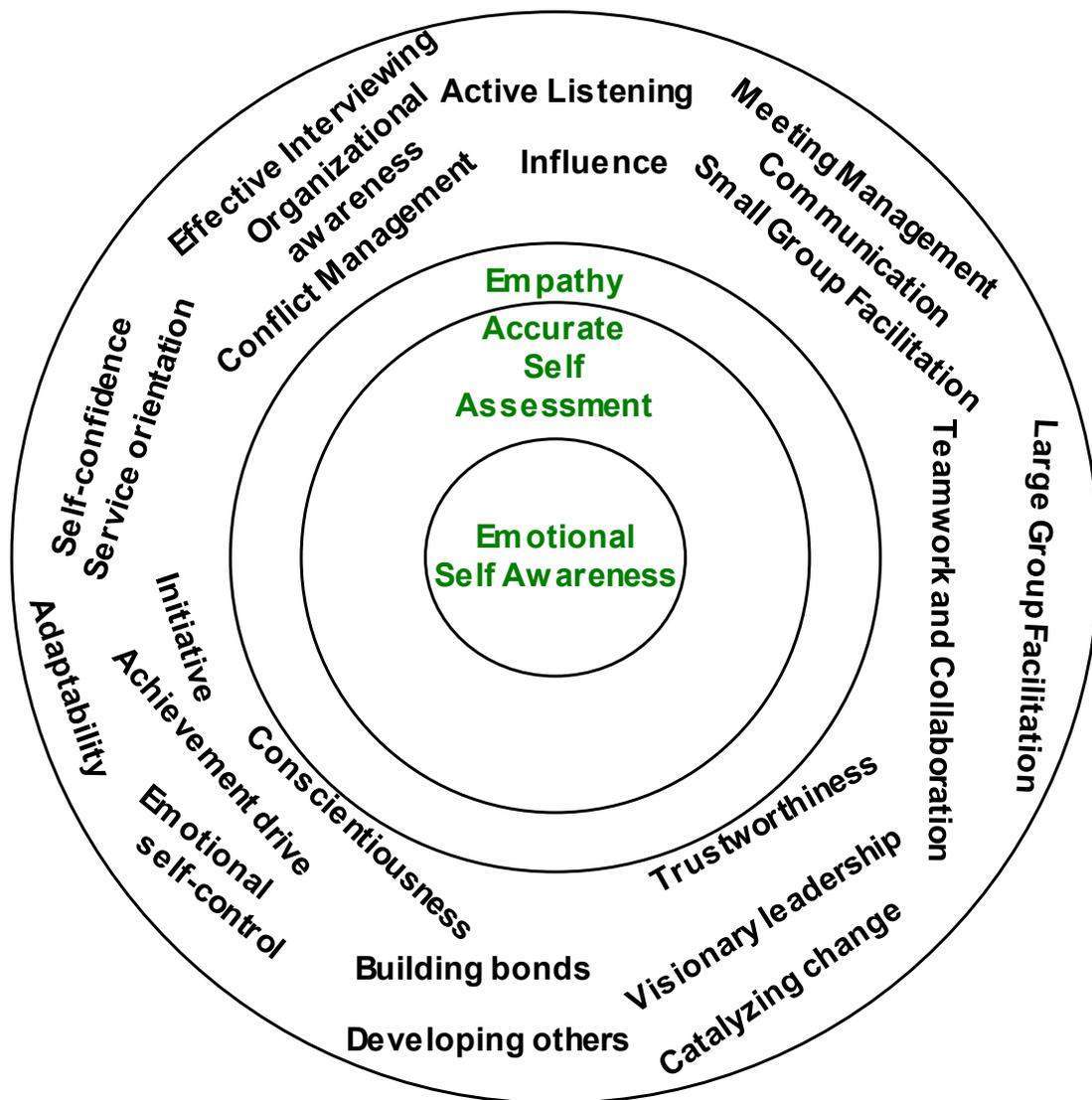
## 2: Personal Emotional Maturity



Not all people with relevant business experience have the personal emotional maturity needed to be an effective business coach. An effective business coach takes pride in the increasing the business achievements of others. Not all experienced business people have this personal characteristic. In fact, many of the most successful ones are successful precisely because they take pride in their own achievements rather than the achievements of others.

Being able to subordinate one's ego, while working towards increasing the self-confidence and pride of accomplishment in another person is a sign of Personal Emotional Maturity. Achieving this level of Personal Emotional Maturity depends on the interaction of several internal psychodynamics.

## Business Competencies and their Inner Core



In the previous schematic, you can see that Emotional Self Awareness, Accurate Self Assessment and Empathy lie at the core of many business competencies. Emotional Self Awareness and Accurate Self Assessment are essential to the development of Personal Emotional Maturity.

1. **Emotional Self-Awareness** – involves knowing what you are feeling in response to events in one’s life, including those that occur at work. Many people just feel. They cannot move to what psychologists call an “internal second position” with respect to their feelings. Doing so allows one to be aware of what one is feeling and have a certain amount of internal detachment about it WHILE STILL

FEELING what one is feeling. This ability is essential to be able to describe what one is feeling to others.

A person's ability to do this has cognitive and emotional elements. The person must be able to describe what they are feeling using words - this is the cognitive part. At the same time, the person must split one's consciousness into layers – to be aware of what one is feeling while at the same time continuing to feel it. Adult development psychologists call this ability being able to take a “second position” with respect to one's feelings. We learn how to do this through life experience, especially during our later teen-age years. The ability to do so, at least some of the time, is what signals our transition into adulthood. ([See Robert Kegan's book "In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life, for much more on this\).](#)

When individual is emotionally self-aware at work, that person can make conscious choices about how they express their emotions in the work place, consciously picking the words they use and even the gestures they engage in. They can also make choices about the timing of that emotional expression. Emotionally self-aware individuals don't just react emotionally to work events and stresses. Instead, they can use their emotions to achieve intended workplace results. -Individuals who have these abilities are often described as [emotionally intelligent](#).

Effective business coaches have a high degree of emotional self-awareness.

2. **Accurate Self Assessment** – involves knowing what you are capable of at work. An individual can accurately **self-assess their level of ability** on many of the competencies shown in the schematic above. Ask these individuals to rate or describe their level on various abilities. Compare their self assessment to the average of the assessment of a number of folks who work closely with these individuals, people who see the public evidence of the results of those abilities. They will be the same. In other words, these individuals self-assess their abilities accurately,

Individuals who achieve this level of self-assessment do so over a period of years. They apply their abilities in a variety of work situations, often becoming progressively more complex. They perceive the results what they achieve because they actively seek out or put in place independent metrics or work measures related to what they are doing. They may get insights into their abilities through participating in 360-degree assessments. They may become aware of

consistent patterns of feedback in performance management reviews done by a number of different superiors over a number of years.

Accurate self-assessment is also key to learning at work. Without having an accurate sense of what you are and are not capable of, you are not self-motivated to learn – to acquire new skills, either technical or interpersonal.

Accurate self-assessment decreases personal defensiveness in the work place. Having a clear sense of what you can do reduces your need to inflate or deflate your sense of self (self-enhancement). As a result, accurate self-assessors are much more likely to see the events around them for what they are. They also experience the people they interact with for who they are. Accurate self-assessors have little or no need to slant or tinge their perceptions with elements which support ideas about what they personally can do.

### **Business Coaches and Business Leaders**

[Jim Collins](#), in his influential book [“Good to Great”](#), describes many of these ways in which Personally Emotionally Mature leaders behave at work. He characterizes Level 5 leaders as showing a “paradoxical combination of personal humility and professional will”.

Effective business coaches add one other element to Collins’ paradoxical mix. They have professional will, but they do not need to express that will through a driving need to personally do which dominates their business interactions with others. Instead, they can also express their personal will through developing the ability of the people they coach.



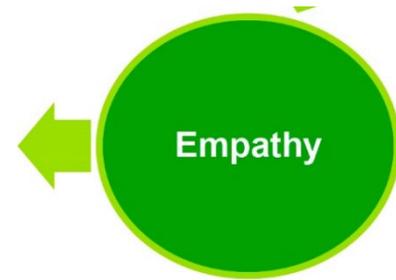
### Being Emotionally Self-Aware and an Accurate Self-Assessor are Required for Empathy at Work

Effective business coaches are emotionally self-aware and are accurate self-assessors. Their internal interaction of these two-internal psychodynamics, developed and strengthened over years of business experience, underlies their workplace empathy.

Personal emotional maturity and accurate self-assessment are the foundation for a business coach's ability to "empathize" with the person being coached.

### 3: Empathy

We cannot directly assess the internal thinking or feeling of another person. However, our evolutionary history has equipped us to do the next best thing – empathizing.



[Empathy](#) is the ability to use our imagination to project what might be going on with another individual:

- to place ourselves in the other’s person’s shoes,
- to think what the other person might be thinking,
- and to feel with the other person might be feeling”.

When our internal projections are accurate - corresponds to what the other person is in fact thinking or feeling – we are in “empathy” with the other person. In fact, research has shown us that we evolved with "[mirror neurons](#)", which react to emotions expressed by others and then reproduce them in ourselves.

Much of the current writing on empathy is focused on its social side. The empathy business coaches need is broader than this. Placing yourself in the shoes of the other person at work has cognitive and emotional elements.

#### The Cognitive Side of Business Empathy

The cognitive side involves being able to imagine the business aspects of a challenge or a task that a person being coached is facing. An effective business coach needs business experience relevant to the business situation of the person being coached to be able to do this. Coaches who do not have such experience simply cannot imagine these business dynamics. They cannot put themselves “into the shoes of the other person” and experience the business situation of that person from the person’s point of view.

#### Thinking, Ideas and Feeling

For human beings, facts and ideas lead to feelings and feelings lead to facts and ideas. David Hume, the English philosopher, stated that the [reason was the slave of the emotions](#). Research in the last decades have uncovered that our brains are [multi-layered](#), having evolved over millions of years. The earliest parts of our brains deal

largely with emotional response and instinctive computation. The later parts evolved to deal with logic and rational thought. The separation between fact and feeling that we all talk about on in a day-to-day an artifact of the limitations of our language. For us as humans, thoughts and feelings occur concurrently in the different layers of our brains.

## Emotional Empathy in Business

Effective business coaches recognize facts, ideas, and feelings are co-mingled in every situation that the person being coached addresses. The emotional side of a business coach's empathy requires that the coach can accurately imagine what a person is feeling as they deal with the business aspects of a challenge or a task.

To do this, the business coach must be able to do 3 things.

1. Separate out what the coach personally feels in response to this business situation – this takes emotional self-awareness.

This self-awareness can also provide clues or hints as to what the other person might be feeling. The coach must combine his or her emotional self-awareness with insights based on experiencing others in similar situations to be able to IMAGINE what the other person might be feeling in this situation.

2. Be aware of the “could I cope” emotional response the coach has this business dynamic.

Even though the coach is not doing in this situation, the coach will have an emotional response to this challenge that is related to the coach's own level of ability in the competencies required to address this business dynamic. This takes accurate self-assessment.

Once the coach is in touch with her or his own response to this dynamic, the coach can then move on to imagining the feelings that the person being coached might be experiencing, given that person's level of ability in these required competencies. Once again, the coach's self-awareness, combined with experience of others in similar situations, is the basis on which the coach IMAGINES what might be going on with the other person.

3. Cognitively organize and combine these emotional insights with the coach's cognitive understanding the strategic and tactical element of this business situation, again based on the coach's own business experience in similar situations.

## Hunch, Dialogue, and Refine

Doing this is not simple. Effective business coaches bring together their relevant business experience, their personal emotional self-awareness, and their accurate self-assessment to empathize in a dynamic way as they test out their empathic insights into the other person in dialogue with that person. They refine their insights in matter of fact dialogue until they have a clear sense of what the other person is experiencing, emotionally and cognitively. Experience allows the coach to build and deepen these empathy skills. Experienced coaches seem to do this effortlessly, without much conscious effort. They are experts at it.

Once this accurate empathy for the other person's situation is achieved, the effective business coach can move onto the next step in a coaching exchange – guiding action.

#### 4: Shareable Expertise



A business coach's effectiveness is measured by increased results delivery on the part of the person being coached. Once the coach has a clear sense of how that other person is experiencing a task or a challenge, the coach must provide guidance what allows the person to act successfully. That takes expertise. Not everyone with the relevant business experience translates that experience into shareable expertise.

#### The Nature of Expertise

[Herbert Simon](#), who won a Nobel Prize for his work on bounded rationality in business, also studied the nature of expertise.

According to Simon, experts sort through millions of pieces of relevant information about an area over the course of many years. They organize the results of this sorting into **50,000 or so inter-connected “chunks” of information**. They use this connected set of knowledge chunks to tackle real life issues in a way that is fundamentally different from the way that the rest of us do so.

Not everyone does this. The individuals who do so are true experts in an area of knowledge. Others see the results of their expertise. These experts stand out in their ability to deliver and to get results in their area of focus, whatever it may be. Expertise like this allows an individual to deliver at far above average levels.

But a coach is not a doer. Instead, a business coach develops the ability of another person to do. So, while an effective business coach must have expertise, that expertise must be shareable. The coach must incorporate her or his expertise into dialogue with the person being coached in a way that leads to that person doing at increased levels of delivery.

#### Sharing Expertise Effectively with a Person Being Coached

A seminal study of [group leaders done by Lieberman, Yalom and Miles](#) distinguished effective from ineffective group leaders. Effective group leaders create straightforward

verbal problem-solving models that other people in their group can understand. These effective leaders help these people to apply these models to their own personal situations.

1. They guide them in dialogue first, encouraging them to investigate possible mistakes in discussion, rather than when they finally act.
2. When the individuals do initiate action, effective group leaders support them and help them reflect upon what they are doing.
3. They guide people through learning from the results of their actions.
4. They set their group members up to apply their new learnings in future situations which are similar to the one in which they first took this action.

Effective business coaches do not just have relevant experience cognitively organized into expertise in this way.

1. They make their expertise available to the person being coached in the form of problem-solving frameworks that are immediately useful to that person.
2. They work with the other person in a way that allows that person to use the coach's expertise to ACT and to SUCCEED. They ensure that the person explores the consequences of their potential action in dialogue.
3. They converse with the other person in a way that ensures that person makes mistakes the person is likely to make "in talk". Through doing so, business coaches dramatically increase the probability of success once the other person starts doing.
4. They support the person during the action period, continuing to engage the person in dialogue that consolidates the person's new ability. The other person's short-term results delivery increases.
5. The coach takes steps to shape that new ability for future use. As a result, when the coaching relationship ends, the person who has been coached has will continue to deliver at greater levels in the long-term.

## 5: One-on-One Interpersonal Skill



To do this, an effective business coach has one-on-one workplace interpersonal skills. The dialogue between the business coach and the person being coached is complex. The other person must be motivated to hear what the coach has to say. The coach must at times inspire, at times support, at times confront, and at times share in way that involves personal disclosure.

The coach must be able to time each of these interactions, and sequence them in a way that increases the depth of the working relationship between the coach and the person being coached over time. Finally, the coach must be able to disengage – to end the relationship – in a way that leaves the other person feel secure in their new abilities.

All of this takes one-on-one skill that is greater than that which gets most of us through most of our business interactions. Some individuals learn to do these things over the course of their business career. Others acquire or deepen their skills through formal training, or mentoring. People may access a coaching skills framework. They may access Internet based [soft skill training programs](#).

# The-Right-Talent.ca Coaching Framework

Some Personal Behavioral Skills	Some Frameworks to Guide My Thinking and My Practice	Some Useful Tools to Improve Communication	Practice, Feedback,
Listen Accurately	The Communication Wheel	Email (personal)	More Practice, More Feedback,
Talk Thoughtfully	The PLISSIT Coaching Model	Phones (personal)	More Practice, More Feedback,
Separate Planning from Doing	The Personal Competency Development Cycle	Quiet Spaces and Time for Private Conversations	More Practice, More Feedback,
Control Expression of Personal Emotions	Know That / Know How To / Know Why Model of Knowledge	Information from Automated Business Applications	More Practice, More Feedback,
... ..	The Development Styles Model		... ..

Regardless of how business coaches acquire these skills, their skill level in these competencies is the foundation to the previous 4 elements needed by business coaches. Without these advanced one-on-one interaction skills, a person cannot be an effective business coach.

## Picking An Effective Business Coach

So how do this translate into practical way of selecting a business coach? The following checklist converts these learnings into a framework that you can use as a business executive looking for a coach, or if you are an HR leader, you can use this as a framework for dialogue with others in your organization.

Key	Question	Things to Look For
<b>Relevant Business Experience</b>	<p>Assessment: Straight Forward</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the coach's career history?</li> <li>2. Does it overlap with the business experience of the person being coached?</li> </ol>	<p>Resumes  LinkedIn profiles  Publications and Internet postings</p>
<b>Personal Emotional Maturity</b>	<p>Assessment: Difficult</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you find posts by this person on LinkedIn and other relevant business places on the Internet that guide any insight?</li> <li>2. Are there recommendations from others that give insight?</li> <li>3. When you talk with the coach, either face to face or over Internet video conferencing, how they strike you as a well-centered person, with a sense of humor, who will take most things at work in stride?</li> </ol>	<p>Recommendations from people you know</p> <p>Posts on topics on LinkedIn and other places on the Internet</p> <p>One on one conversation</p>
<b>Accurate Self Assessment</b>	<p>Assessment: Moderately Difficult</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do others say about this person's level of ability on various relevant business competencies (see schematic on previous pages)?</li> <li>2. How does this compare to how the coach sees him or her self in these areas when you talk with the coach?</li> </ol>	<p>Insights on the coach's level of ability from people who know the coach</p> <p>COMPARED TO</p> <p>How the coach describes these abilities when you talk to the coach</p>
<b>Shareable Expertise</b>	<p>Assessment: Straight Forward to Moderately Difficult</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can the coach share presentations, work products, or</li> </ol>	<p>Demonstrations of the coach's ability to share expertise on the Internet, through presentations, and so on ....</p>

Key	Question	Things to Look For
	<p>publications that give you insight into what the COACH has personally done in the area of expertise?</p> <p>2. Will the coach share contact information about people who can comment on this?</p> <p>3. Is there evidence available on the Internet or in other public places, about the coach's expertise?</p>	
<p><b>One on One Interpersonal Skill</b></p>	<p>Assessment: Straight Forward to Moderately Difficult</p> <p>1. Does the coach's career history show a progression that corresponds to 5 levels of Collin's 5 Levels (see graphic on previous pages)?</p> <p>2. Do people who know the coach talk about her or his ability to get along with people under both normal and conditions of work place stress?</p>	<p>Insights on the coach's level of soft skill ability from people who know the coach</p> <p>COMPARED TO</p> <p>Your own impression of the coach's soft skill abilities</p>

**Why Bother?**

Working with an effective business coach has a huge potential payback for a person and the person's organization. When the person being coached manages others, this payback has the potential to leverage the time and the talent of all the people being managed. This payback is can be in the hundreds of percentage points.

Investing in individuals through coaching makes sense for organizations, but they have to be careful. Having an engaging personality is not the same as being an effective business coach. Some of the people who have put out their shingles as business coaches are certainly engaging people, but they often lack in one the one or more of the 5 key areas described above.

Effective business coaches understand this. They will work with you to demonstrate where they stand on each of these 5 key elements. They will work with you to set out a

set of metrics – measures about results – that you can use to evaluate their effectiveness of their coaching.

They know that the individual being coached must be motivated to benefit from the coaching relationship. They will talk to that person to determine the individual's level of motivation early on in. They will be frank with everyone involved about their perception of that level of motivation, and the resulting likelihood of coaching success.

The best business coaches may not be the cheapest - given their years of experience and their demonstrated expertise that is to be expected. But the return from their efforts will pay for the expense many times over.

About the author ...



**“Be the best work team player and manager of others you can be.”**

E-learning programs and face-to-face  
soft skill development programs.

***“After decades of managing more great people  
than I can count,  
I realized that soft skills rather  
than technical know-how  
are what makes a person  
an effective leader.”***

Top of the line performers  
take responsibility for the skill development  
needed to drive their own career progression.

**Roelf Woldring**  
**[The Right Talent](#)**

**1-416-427-1567**

4 decades of work experience summed up

**“Talent trumps everything.**

**No matter how great your vision,  
or how powerful your technology,  
without talented people to execute,  
you have NOTHING.”**

**“People perform on the job,  
not resumes  
or performance appraisals.”**

**Roelf Woldring**