

New game: Take me out, coach!

Transition coaching helps execs who are set to retire, move on

BY LISA BIANK FASIG / STAFF REPORTER

Remember the go-go '80s? Back then, up-and-comers turned to career coaches to get them on the fast track. But these days, some of those same executives — now at the top of their game — are turning to executive coaches to keep them from completely derailing.

Call it coaching of the last resort. Large employers are turning to consultants to assist high-ranking employees who may soon be placed out of the company. It's all part of the evolution of the coaching industry, whose players are seeking ways to diversify following the boom years of the 1980s and 1990s, two decades that made coaching a commodity.



Todd Uterstaedt

But such "transition" coaching is no small investment. Some employers — and increasingly, the executives themselves — are paying up to \$35,000 for executive coaching as job turnover, competition and litigation make the job market a much more complicated place to get ahead in, or out of.

Longevity has something to do with it — many baby boomers hire executive coaches as they reach mandatory retirement age but know they've got another 20 years in them.

Then there is the sort of consultation that assists executives who are, to use a vague euphemism, "not a good fit." Often, these are people who were placed in jobs that don't suit their talents, or who might not see eye-to-eye with other key members of management — not uncommon among ambitious and talented people.

In the past, executives would be sent to outplacement companies or career coaches on their way out. These days, they get executive coaches to either help them move out of the company, or to help them succeed within it.

"I have been hired sometimes just to be an unbiased sounding board. To listen to them

and help them sort through the complexities of their business," said Todd Uterstaedt, CEO of Baker & Daboll in Mason.

It's an investment he said more executives and companies are willing to make. Transition coaching represents as much as 10 percent of Uterstaedt's business; about 25 percent of his clients pay for it themselves.

That has helped executive coaching as a whole grow into a \$1 billion industry, according to research by the International Coach Federation.

The business of coaching is not new, though. It dates back to World War II, when returning soldiers tried to find a place among America's corporations and turned to experts to help place them in jobs. Later, those same coaches began helping workers as they lost their jobs.

By the 1980s and 1990s, outplacement consulting became mainstream, as a culture of mergers, acquisitions and downsizing dominated industry. Corporations hired coaches to effectively deal with mass terminations, with the added benefits of limiting lawsuits.

"I've watched it change from corporate outplacement to becoming much more of a commodity," said Diana Bragg, president of Leadership Coaching & Development, in Atlanta. "Employees began to realize it, too, that their employment was not guaranteed long-term. So outplacement firms sprang up all over the place."

But as a lot of this skill-building information became readily available online and in books, the coaching industry faced a potential crisis. To survive, they diversified and tailored their services to be more comprehensive.

Enter the coach for problem executive.

For these "poor fit" workers, transition coaching can help executives figure out who they really are and how to make the most of their talent. Sometimes it is just a matter of becoming a better "people person," or finding a more compatible corporate environment.

Executive consulting can take months. Coaches can engage their clients in predictable exercises, such as role playing, but often have to personalize the treatment. Uterstaedt once



MARK BOWEN | COURIER

Todd Uterstaedt, a coach with Baker & Daboll, sees more executives who need help with either advancing to the next stage in a company, or leaving (voluntarily or not) for a new job.

advised a client to paint pictures, for instance, after learning the executive had stopped doing it in favor his career.

Some peg retirement coaching as the next big opportunity in the field, as baby boomers consider their post-office life. But in this case, executives are more likely to be seeking life purpose: charitable work, a career change, family and even spiritual relationships, said Terri Logan of Evendale, who has been coaching for almost 20 years.

"When people leave companies, how they structure their life is very different than when it is structured for them," she said. "It's not really about doing, it's about being. What kind of private person do I want to be?"