

International Coaching Awareness Month

Interview with Sue Edwards, President of Development by Design

In January, 2005, ICF-GTA Director Greg Welstead interviewed Sue about her upcoming presentation, *Clearing the 90-Day Hurdle: Leveraging Coaching to Support New Leaders*, held in February, 2005 as part of Coaching Awareness Month in the Greater Toronto Area. Here's the transcript...

Greg: Good morning, Sue. I'm interested to know what got you involved in this topic. The first 90-days after a leader joins an organization is a very specific timeframe for coaching.

Sue: Indeed it is a specific timeframe, Greg. And one that I think is crying out for the support of the coaching profession.

Here's what drew me to this niche... as a former Human Resources manager and Consultant accountable for recruitment strategies, organization branding, talent attraction and selection, I have seen the inordinate time, effort and dollars that are spent on recruitment. I have also observed the significant time and energy invested by candidates in the interview process as well as the decision to move to a new organization. Yet once a successful candidate is found, it seems that considerably less effort is spent on ensuring the return on that investment—ensuring that the new leader has a successful transition into the organization.

GW: In your Seminar outline, you describe coaching as being a “safe place”...what do you mean by this?

Sue: Think about the dynamics. A leader decides to leave his or her current organization for a presumably “better opportunity”. After a lengthy interview process, she is the successful candidate. Not long after joining the new organization, she starts to have self-doubts or questions about the new environment—a very common reaction. Her internal dialogue might involve thoughts like...“*I've over sold myself for the job...*” *they are expecting way too much of me*”, “*this company culture isn't at all what I expected...I think I've been sold a bill of goods*”...“*they loved me where I was and now I have to start all over to prove myself*”, etc.

Who is this leader going to turn to regarding these thoughts to get support in dealing with them in a constructive way?

GW: Hmm...I see your point. You can't exactly go to the new boss with these concerns.

Sue: True. It's often also too early to know whether there are peers that you can trust. Furthermore, as a new leader, she knows that the HR department is going to be actively involved in her development program and determining where she fits in the company's succession plans, so she may be reluctant to express weakness there. She likely feels that she can't tell her direct reports how unnerved she is and shake their confidence in her. She may have just asked her spouse to give up his job, relocate their home and change schools for the children...She may not even feel comfortable telling him that she's worried that she made a mistake. And as much as she respected the search firm through the recruitment process, she knows that part of their compensation is based on whether she stays with the new organization, so she might worry about whether they can be completely objective.

GW: So you are suggesting that a professional leadership coach could be the answer.

Sue: An important part of the answer, absolutely! A coach can be a key supplement to the support already being provided by the new boss, the HR team, the search firm, and new peers. A professionally-trained coach can be assigned to work with the new leader as their client, in a confidential, constructive and forward-looking relationship. The coach can assist new leaders in sorting out their thoughts and reactions, help them to focus on what they need to do to transition in effectively and work with them on a plan of action.

GW: You sound extremely passionate about this subject.

Sue: That's an understatement! I get really cranked up from a number of angles.

First, there is such a huge return to the company for investing in the cost of Coaching for a 3-month period. As you well know, the cost of replacing an employee at any level is significant, let alone a leader in the organization. The coaching investment is a very small percentage of the cost of turnover and replacement.

Second, there is such inordinate value to the new leader. I have seen the difference that it makes to have someone who is fully supportive of the new incumbent, skilled to address the specific issues with them and with whom there is absolutely confidentiality.

Third, in my coaching practice, I am highly committed to supporting my clients in making conscious choices. I see coaching in the first 90-days to be a critical juncture where new leaders can exercise choice. I am interested in helping people either commit fully to their new organizations or, in some cases, to determine whether the new environment or role needs to be re-considered. It is clearly to the benefit of both the new leader and the hiring organization that this clarity be gained as quickly as possible and with as thorough and reflective an analysis as possible.

GW: I can understand how having a dedicated coach would make great sense for a new leader joining an organization, so tell me what you mean by different "models" of coaching?

Sue: Certainly. A recruitment firm recently challenged me to consider how I could reach more people with the value of coaching, particularly at levels below the executive ranks where organizations may not be as readily able to commit to the investment of one-on-one coaching.

This is where the idea of the group coaching/workshop format and the self-coaching workbook came in.

Group coaching will particularly appeal to organizations who recruit several professionals into similar roles within the same timeframe. For example, Sales Representatives. Monthly or bi-monthly coaching sessions could be held for a group of sales reps, facilitated by an external coach, to address the important concerns of the first 90-days.

Supplementing these workshops, or as a stand alone offering, I am developing a self-coaching workbook to assist people in championing their own successful transitions into a new organization. The workbook will provide the value of provocative coaching questions and exercises to guide them along the way. It will literally take people through a 12-week program...chapter by chapter... to "clear the 90-day hurdle".

Greg: I'm curious why you list recruitment firms as being part of your target audience for this Seminar.

Sue: I'm glad you asked. I'm really excited about the opportunity for progressive-thinking search firms who work in true partnership with their clients. By offering Coaching as part of the services to support the candidate after they are hired, I see this as a unique opportunity to differentiate themselves and show strong integrity. A few of the major consulting houses who conduct

recruitment and international recruitment organizations are already partnering with professionally-trained coaches, often under a separate organization, to provide this service to their clients.

Greg: I can imagine that such an offering would be very appealing to certain candidates.

Sue: Yes, In Canada, having an executive coach has not quite reached the level of status that it has in some circles in the U.S. But clearly it is moving in the direction of a highly valued perquisite and a definite sign that an employer is committed to a new employee's development.

Greg: A company that is interested in being seen as an "Employer of Choice", then, would also have a real opportunity here.

Sue: Without a doubt! An organization that is truly committed to fully supporting people who join their organization—even at the risk of having the new employee figure out that they shouldn't be there—has a huge opportunity to differentiate themselves—particularly among organizations in Canada. We're at the edge of the curve. It's a much more common practice in Europe, Asia and parts of the U.S.

Greg: Thank you for sharing your enthusiasm for coaching in this arena. At a time when the Coaching profession is very committed to research to demonstrate the ROI of coaching, I can see where this niche could add extraordinary value for the coachees, the sponsoring organizations and frankly the Coaching profession as a whole.

Sue: Thank you, Greg, for the opportunity to convey my excitement. I look forward to seeing a great turnout of line executives, human resources professionals and representatives from search firms alike on Feb. 22nd.