
What is Executive Coaching!

A Clear Guide for Leaders and Business Owners

- ◆ Deeper Self-Awareness
- ◆ Stronger Decision-Making
- ◆ Leadership Clarity
- ◆ Sustainable High Performance

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FILMA | Level 7 ILM | 5,000+ Coaching Hours



What Does an Executive Coach Actually Do?

A Clear Guide for Leaders and Business Owners

One of the most common questions leaders ask is simple: "

What does an executive coach actually do?"

Despite the rapid growth of coaching over the past decade, the profession is often misunderstood. Some assume it is motivational conversation. Others believe it is simply advice.

In reality, high-quality executive coaching is a professional discipline requiring rigorous training, structured methodology, and significant real-world leadership experience - getting the right coach will get the right results!

The Standard That Matters

Why Qualification Level Is Everything

For leaders considering coaching, one factor matters above all others: **the capability and qualification level of the coach.**

Institute of Leadership and Management - The Level 7 Standard

In the UK and internationally, the Level 7 Executive Coaching and Mentoring qualification represents one of the highest professional standards in the field, equivalent to postgraduate-level study.

What This Means for Leaders

Leaders working with a qualified executive coach are engaging with a practitioner trained in advanced leadership psychology, behavioural change, organisational dynamics, and performance development.

This article explains what executive coaching really involves, what happens in a coaching relationship, and why choosing a qualified coach matters. The purpose is to enable great leaders to navigate the waters toward knowing what to ask for when seeking growth support from a professional executive and business coach.

What Executive Coaching Is

Executive coaching is a structured professional partnership that helps leaders improve their thinking, leadership capability, and strategic effectiveness.



Deeper Self-Awareness

Develop a clearer understanding of your own leadership behaviours and motivations.



Stronger Decision-Making

Sharpen your ability to make high-stakes decisions with greater clarity and confidence.



Lead People More Effectively

Understand how your leadership style impacts team performance and organisational culture.



Navigate Complex Challenges

Work through complex business challenges with a structured, experienced thinking partner.



Align Purpose and Success

Align professional success with personal purpose for sustainable, meaningful leadership.

Rather than simply offering advice, a coach works as a thinking partner, helping leaders explore their assumptions, recognise patterns in their leadership behaviour, and identify the actions that will move them forward. This can also be where a more experienced coach can support the business in a more consultant style of working to give realistic options and speed to the challenges ahead.

The Frameworks Behind Great Coaching

The process often combines reflective conversation with structured frameworks, allowing leaders to better understand what might be called their **leadership DNA**—the unique combination of strengths, motivations, and capabilities that shape how they lead.

1

Leadership Strengths Assessments

Identifying and mapping the natural strengths that define how a leader operates at their best. These translate to business differentiators.

2

Values Clarification

Exploring the core values that drive decision-making and shape leadership identity. These will drive the day to day practices of leadership and be formative of the culture the team of business operate within.

3

Behavioural and Personality Insights

Understanding patterns of behaviour and how they influence relationships and outcomes. Self understanding is the start of leadership and growth: **Know Yourself - Know Your People - Know Your Profession**

4

Purpose Discovery — Ikigai

Exploring the intersection of passion, mission, vocation, and profession through Ikigai frameworks. This is a personal and professional journey where the deeper life and work motivations are explored in the context of the path forwards!

5

Strategic Leadership Planning

Translating self-awareness into a clear, actionable plan for leadership growth and organisational impact. This is where the professional coach supports the insights gained to develop an accountability based plan with clear and tracked goals.

Why Qualification and Experience Matter

Coaching is an unregulated profession in many countries, meaning the title "coach" can be used by people with very different levels of expertise. **This is why professional standards matter.**

A Level 7 ILM Qualified Executive Coach Has Completed Advanced Training Covering:

- Leadership psychology
- Organisational behaviour
- Behavioural change methodology
- Professional ethics and supervision
- Evidence-based coaching frameworks

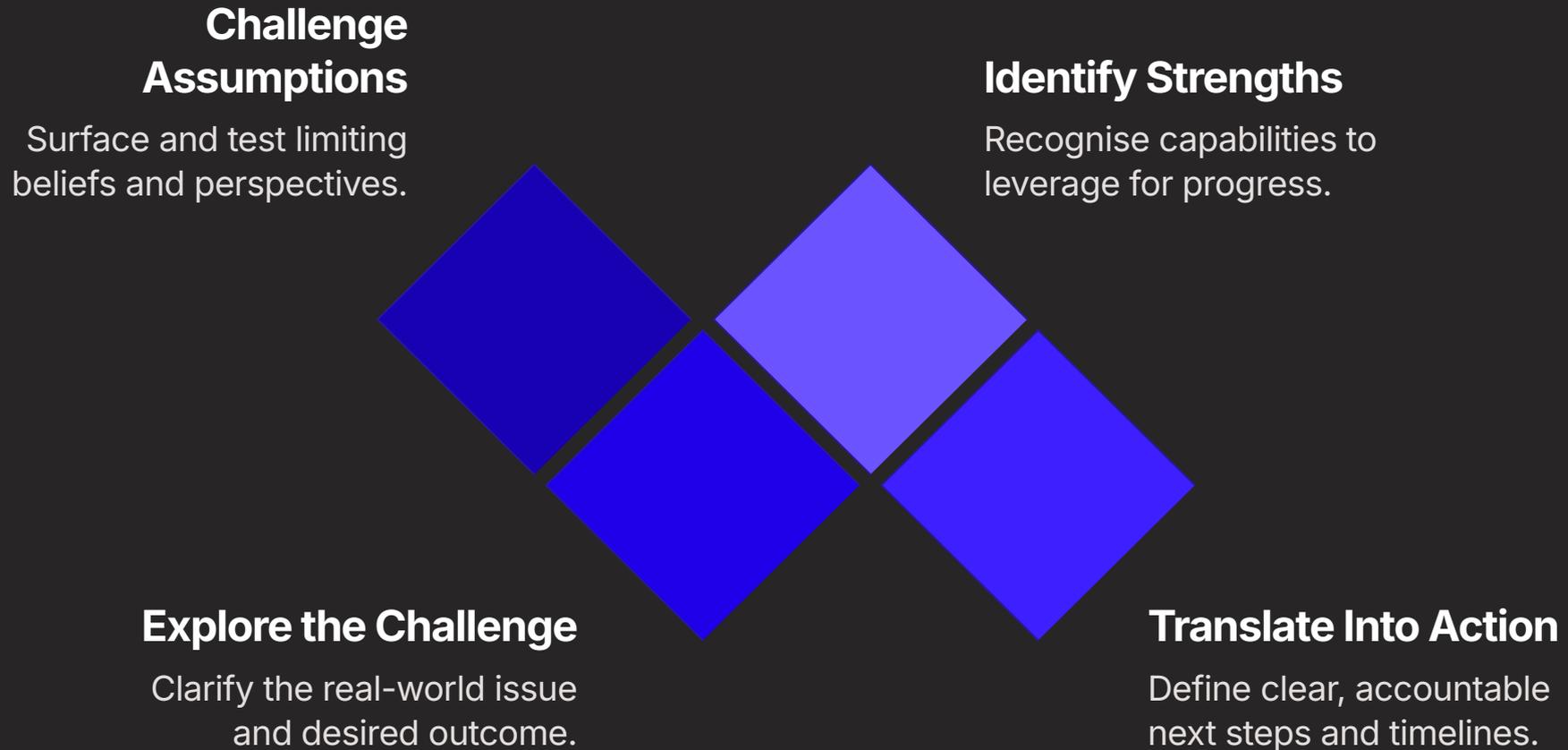
Real-World Experience

In addition, the most effective executive coaches bring extensive real-world leadership experience.

A coach who understands the pressures of leading organisations, managing teams, and making high-stakes decisions can support leaders in a far more **practical and relevant way.**

What Happens in an Executive Coaching Session

A coaching session is a structured conversation designed to unlock clarity, insight, and action. Sessions are **confidential** and focused on the leader's real-world challenges.



Each stage builds on the last — moving the leader from presenting challenge through to clear, committed action that drives real progress before the next session. This often enables a transition from forming a plan to growing a business goal by goal in the real world challenges of the business and the market that it operates within.

Inside the Session

From Challenge to Clarity

Exploring the Current Leadership Challenge

Leaders often bring issues such as strategic decisions, team leadership challenges, organisational growth, personal leadership confidence, or navigating complex stakeholder relationships. The coach helps unpack the situation and identify the deeper dynamics influencing the issue.

Challenging Assumptions and Expanding Thinking

A key role of the coach is asking powerful questions that encourage deeper reflection — exploring hidden assumptions, leadership behaviours, decision-making patterns, and the impact of the leader's actions on others. This process often leads to powerful shifts in perspective.

Identifying Strengths and Leadership Patterns

Many leaders spend years trying to correct weaknesses rather than leveraging their natural strengths. Coaching helps leaders understand where their natural leadership strengths lie, how their behaviours influence organisational culture, and how their leadership style impacts team performance.

Translating Insight Into Action

A coaching conversation must always lead to progress. Sessions typically conclude with clear actions and commitments that the leader will implement before the next meeting. Over time, these small steps compound into significant leadership development and organisational improvement.

What Problems Executive Coaching Helps Solve

Executive coaching is particularly valuable when leaders face complex challenges that cannot be solved by technical knowledge alone.

Leadership Confidence

Even highly capable leaders experience periods of doubt or pressure. Coaching helps them reconnect with their strengths and develop authentic leadership confidence.

Business Growth and Strategic Clarity

As organisations grow, leaders must evolve their thinking — clarifying strategic direction, identifying growth opportunities, developing more effective leadership structures, and building high-performing teams.

Decision Making Under Pressure

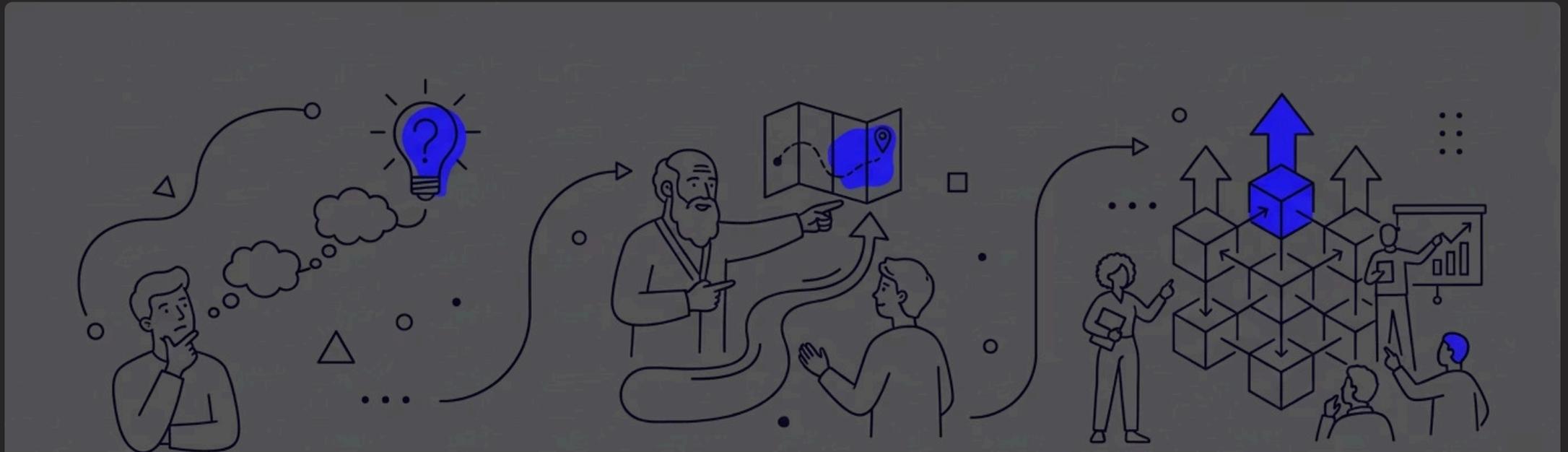
Senior leaders constantly make decisions with incomplete information. Coaching provides a confidential environment to evaluate options clearly and think strategically.

Leadership Transitions

Many leaders experience significant change when stepping into senior leadership, scaling a growing business, or transitioning from founder to organisational leader. Coaching supports these transitions with structured reflection and planning.

Coaching, Mentoring and Consultancy: Understanding the Difference

A highly experienced executive coach may work across three related but distinct roles depending on what the leader needs. Understanding these differences is important.



COACHING

Develops leader's insights/solutions via questions/reflection. Strengthens thinking.

MENTORING

Shares relevant experience/perspective. For new roles or challenges.

BUSINESS GROWTH CONSULTANCY

Provides strategic ideas, frameworks, leadership structures. Guides thought.

- ❑ The most effective executive coaches know when to remain purely in coaching mode and when to bring strategic expertise into the conversation.

Going Deeper

The Three Roles in Detail

Coaching

In coaching, the focus is on helping the leader develop their own insights and solutions. The coach asks questions, provides frameworks, and facilitates reflection. The aim is to strengthen the leader's capability and thinking.

Mentoring

Mentoring involves sharing relevant experience. A mentor may offer perspective based on situations they have previously encountered. This can be particularly helpful for leaders entering new roles or navigating unfamiliar challenges.

Business Growth Consultancy

Some highly experienced executive coaches also support leaders through strategic business consultancy. In this context the coach may move beyond questioning and contribute strategic ideas, organisational insights, growth frameworks, and leadership development structures.

The key difference is that **consultancy provides deep guidance, whereas coaching develops the leader's own thinking.**



Who Benefits Most From Executive Coaching

Executive coaching tends to deliver the greatest value for individuals who carry significant responsibility and influence.



Business Owners and Entrepreneurs

Founders frequently lack a confidential space to explore leadership challenges. A coach provides independent perspective and strategic thinking support. Finding the space to think and test the unthinkable is a key opportunity within coaching.



Senior Leaders and Directors

Executives responsible for large teams or complex organisations benefit greatly from structured leadership reflection. This reflection will often be applicable more widely to the business as a whole and support a deeper talent management plan.



High-Potential Leaders

Organisations increasingly invest in coaching to accelerate the development of emerging leadership talent. This insight also supports the leader to not only create impactful talent management programmes but also to consider how this thinking governs recruitment cycles.

The common factor is simple: coaching works best with leaders who are **committed to growth** and open to deeper self-awareness.

Typical Outcomes of Executive Coaching

While every coaching journey is unique, leaders often report similar outcomes.

1

Greater Clarity

Stronger strategic focus and a clearer sense of direction.

2

Leadership Confidence

Authentic confidence rooted in a deep understanding of personal strengths.

3

Improved Communication

Better team engagement and more effective stakeholder relationships.

4

Values Alignment

Clearer alignment between personal values and leadership style.

5

Better Decisions

Improved decision-making under pressure with greater strategic clarity.

6

Business Growth

Measurable business growth and meaningful organisational improvement.

Over time, coaching helps leaders develop a deeper understanding of themselves and how they influence others. This self-awareness becomes the foundation for **sustainable leadership success**.

The Real Value of Working With a High-Quality Executive Coach

Leadership can be isolating. The higher someone rises within an organisation, the fewer people they can speak openly with about the real pressures of leadership.

A highly qualified executive coach provides something rare: a confidential, experienced thinking partner focused entirely on the leader's development and success.

When that coach combines advanced coaching expertise with real business insight, the result is powerful.

The Reflective Space

The space needed to grow — to explore assumptions, challenge patterns, and develop genuine self-awareness as a leader.

The Strategic Perspective

The insight needed to build stronger organisations — drawing on real business experience and evidence-based frameworks.

In an increasingly complex business world, that combination can make a remarkable difference.

Mark Bates @ Applebright Coaching

A Premium Executive Coaching Service

Applebright Coaching is positioned as a premium executive coaching service, working with leaders and business owners who are serious about growth, clarity, and sustainable success.

01

Level 7 Qualified

Coaching delivered to the highest professional standard — equivalent to postgraduate-level study in executive coaching and mentoring.

03

Flexible Expertise

The ability to move fluidly between deep coaching, mentoring, and strategic business growth consultancy — depending on what the leader needs.

02

Real Leadership Experience

Coaching that understands the real pressures of leading organisations, managing teams, and making high-stakes decisions.

04

Confidential Partnership

A trusted, confidential space where leaders can think clearly, grow authentically, and lead with greater impact.

To find out more just get in touch for a free discovery session with Mark Bates - mark@applebrightcoaching.co.uk or Mobile 07494890802