



WHITE PAPER

Hiring an Executive Business Coach



Where do you turn when you have a question about your business?

The best business leaders aren't those who always know the right solution for everything. They're the ones who know when to seek advice and who often have a stable of trusted advisors they can turn to. Some of these relationships may be informal, but many business owners also seek out formal advisory relationships through local associations, independent consultants and business coaches.

Many larger businesses have the luxury of a board of directors, but where do small businesses turn for an outside perspective? That was the question The Alternative Board (TAB) sought to answer in a recent Small Business Pulse Survey. We spoke with business owners from around the globe to learn who they asked for advice and what impact it had on their businesses.

Whether you run a small family-owned business or a large corporation, our survey found it simply makes good business sense to have a trustworthy advisor. Read on to learn the benefits and how to find the right solution to fit your business.

“David vs. Goliath”

In a competitive industry, Debbie Smook and her husband Eli Uriel of Turbofil Packaging Machines work hard to hold their own against international giants. Their secret weapon? The advice and support of their fellow TAB Board Members, which has helped level the playing field.

“Every big corporation has a board,” says Smook. “They're insider-outsiders; they know your business and what's going on, but they're not so close they lose sight of the big picture.” Smook's company may be small, but her TAB Membership gives her the advantage of a bigger company's tool chest. “You do need objective views of your business,” she says.

Debbie Smook
Turbofil Packaging Machines, LLC (Industrial Packaging)
Mount Vernon, NY
Member since 2007

Who Do Business Owners Trust Most?

Our survey found that most business owners seek advice from a variety of sources:



Peers:

Nearly a third (31%) listed Fellow Business Owners as their most trusted advisor. These relationships may range from informal friendships to professional associations and advisory boards.



Coaches:

Nearly one quarter (24%) chose Business Coaches as their current most trusted advisors. 80% of respondents reported having used some form of a coach in their career, and 41% had utilized one in the past six months.



Family:

The third-highest category was Family Member (18%).



Other:

No other category received a double-digit answer — however, small percentages of business owners also reported their most trusted advisor to be accountants, employees, consultants, friends and attorneys.

Combined, Fellow Business Owners and Business Coaches make up over 50% of respondents' choice as a trusted advisor. This suggests that a large percentage of business owners are actively seeking outside coaching and mentorship, rather than relying on informal conversations with employees, friends and family.

One interesting insight from the survey was that business owners who had used a business coach tended to believe more strongly in the affect a coach would have on their business. 71% of business owners who had utilized a coach in the past rated the coach's impact on their business as a seven or higher, whereas only 18% of respondents who had never used a business coach rated the potential impact as seven or higher.

With business coaches, it seems, it's difficult to gauge the potential impact without actually experiencing the relationship. Many business owners simply aren't aware of just how effective a business coach can be until they have worked with one. This indicates that many owners are missing a valuable opportunity to grow their operations and make a positive impact on their companies.

Business Coach or Business Consultant?

What's the difference between a business coach and a business consultant? At first glance they may seem similar, but there are major differences beneath the surface.

Business owners hire consultants in order to give them answers to challenges the business is facing. Often, a business consultant will focus on a specific area — like logistics improvement, customer service, marketing or succession planning. A business consultant should provide solutions and sometimes even help with implementation.

A business coach, on the other hand, helps business owners arrive at the best answers themselves. While a consultant should tell you how make your business run better, a business coach will help you learn to see these solutions for yourself over time. A consultant can be invaluable for a specific problem in the short term, but, in the long run, a coach will make you a better businessperson.

An Outside Perspective

Finding a trusted advisor is difficult for many small business owners, but Kimberly Stufflet of Preferred Aviation Underwriters knew she needed an outside perspective to help solve her company's expensive employee retention problems.

Stufflet reached out to TAB in 2010. There, board members helped her revamp her hiring process and brainstorm a new marketing strategy perfect for her industry. "As a business owner, you experience peaks and valleys daily, but it is the perseverance and knowing when to ask for help that is essential for your success," says Stufflet. "My company would not be where we are today if I had not reached out to The Alternative Board."

Kimberley Stufflet
Preferred Aviation Underwriters (Insurance)
Atlanta, GA
Member since 2010

Benefits of Hiring a Business Coach

Hiring a business coach can be beneficial no matter what stage your business is at. If your company is growing, a business coach can help that growth be strategic and sustainable. If business is stalled, a coach can help uncover the reasons why and get things back on track.

This is clear in the response to our survey. When asked whether they were more likely to retain a business coach when the market is weak or strong, 54% chose “weak,” while 46% chose “strong.” This suggests that the benefits of hiring a business coach go far beyond troubleshooting problems.

Respondents listed accountability (31%), business growth (30%) and having someone to discuss business concerns with (26%) as the three biggest benefits of hiring a coach.

Other benefits include:

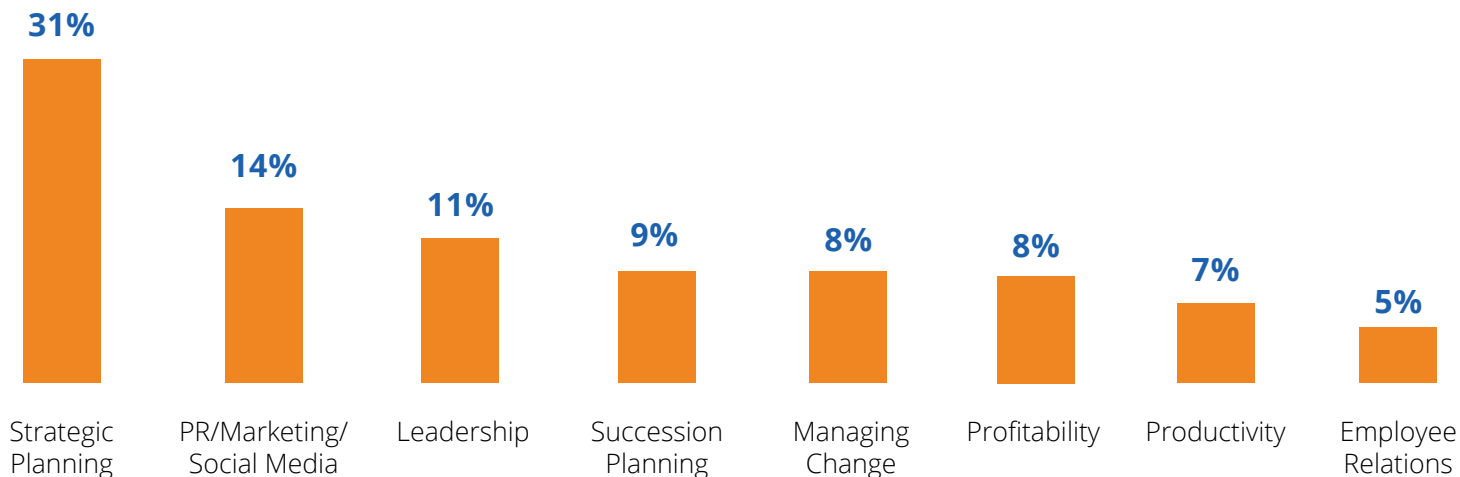
Developing your skills as a business owner

Most business owners can identify specific skills they could improve upon. Could you be a better communicator? A better negotiator? Better at managing your time and setting goals for your business? A business coach can help you work in specific areas, developing skills that will help you succeed not only in this current business but in whatever venture you take on in the future.

Planning and strategy

Business coaches are most beneficial in areas of strategic planning, rather than tactical solutions. The majority of our respondents indicated that a business coach offered value in areas related to planning and strategy, rather than merely focusing on specifics.

When asked where a business coach helped, respondents replied:



Active, objective listening

Good business coaches are trained in active listening. This means more than sitting quietly while you voice your concerns — it means asking thoughtful questions, offering feedback and “listening between the lines” for what’s really going on.

What’s more, a business coach offers an objective, confidential perspective. This allows you the freedom to discuss sensitive matters with someone who is more removed from the problem at hand and gives you a fresh perspective.

An Outside Perspective

Kirsty Davies-Chinnock began at Professional Polishing Services in 1989, working her way to the position of Managing Director just before the financial crisis of 2008. Under her guidance, the company readily weathered the recession — but she wondered if her close ties to the business were causing her to miss potential solutions.

When she joined TAB, she found that her fellow board members allowed her to get a new perspective because of their own varied experiences. Additionally, they kept her accountable by asking the difficult questions. “I would recommend TAB to anyone who is prepared to look at themselves and their business,” says Davies-Chinnock. “It will show the ‘ugly spots,’ but it’s enlightening to see them, accept them and do something about them.”

TAB also helped Davies-Chinnock grow her skills as a business owner and gave her the tools to pursue her own goals. “TAB has helped me rediscover myself as an individual,” she says.

Kirsty Davies-Chinnock
Professional Polishing Services Ltd
West Midlands, UK
Member since 2011

Imparting business knowledge

When you work with a business coach, you take advantage of their breadth of knowledge and expertise. A good business coach will be up-to-date on the latest research and trends and can help you apply them to your business. For this reason, it’s beneficial to work with someone who has experience in your industry or field.

Identifying strengths and weaknesses

In addition to business insights, a good coach can also help uncover personal insights. By understanding your strengths and shoring up your weaknesses, you become a better businessperson. This translates to success in your field — both today and in your future endeavors.

A Roadmap for Growth

When Doug Hohener of CreativeWorks Marketing found himself needing to grow his business beyond a one-man show, he knew he was heading into uncharted territory. As a young entrepreneur, the thought of hiring employees and moving into an office space was anxiety-inducing. He needed advice.

By joining TAB, he had an opportunity to sit down with other entrepreneurs to hear how they had handled the same issues. "It keeps things in perspective," says Hohener. "One thing I've learned is that change is part of growth. It makes us all nervous. But if things stay the same, nothing will happen."

Having an advisory board at that critical moment transformed Hohener's business. "Without TAB, I wouldn't be where I am today," he says. "I joined TAB at a time where I was either going to go back to consulting or jump in with two feet and go for it. I've never looked back."

Doug Hohener
CreativeWorks Marketing
Markham, ON
Member since 2009

What to Look for in a Business Coach



Working with a business coach is a very personal relationship, which is why it pays to spend time finding the right person. The majority of respondents to our survey noted they relied on personal referrals to find the right business coach. Many also reviewed testimonials and case studies of other coaching clients to help them make a decision.

When we asked respondents which attributes they valued most in selecting a business coach, three main areas stood out: coaching style and philosophy (35%), areas of expertise (27%) and character and integrity (25%). Other key qualities that respondents identified as being important for a business coach were insight (49%), experience (24%) and trust (18%).

This demonstrates that along with experience, the primary characteristics business owners are looking for are personal compatibility and trustworthiness.

Other key expectations that business owners have of coaches are:



31%

To ask the right questions



26%

To focus on measurable change



18%

To conduct a thorough business assessment



15%

To tackle the tough issues



Peer Advisors: TAB Members

As noted on page 2, 31% of respondents to our survey chose “other business owners” as their most trusted advisors. One of the many ways this advisory relationship can take place is through professional associations or advisory boards such as the ones The Alternative Board (TAB) facilitates.

TAB’s Business Owner Advisory Boards are modeled after the boards of directors used by larger companies. They help business owners create actionable strategic plans, hold them accountable to their goals and provide a sounding board of like-minded professionals. Typical board meetings are held once a month, with each TAB Member getting an opportunity to reflect on their goals and share a particular issue with other members of the board.

The result is a mix of accountability, actionable advice and professional business relationships that help each board member achieve their goals and grow their businesses. A full 90% of TAB Members say that the board meetings and coaching sessions add real value to the business — and those members who can quantify their ROI believed that the cost of a TAB Membership had anywhere from two times to 10 times the return on investment. Overall, while the national average revenue growth for 2015 was 7.8%, TAB Members reported 15% average revenue growth that year.

TAB's core benefits of advisory boards, coaching sessions, consulting and networking opportunities are a boon for business owners, both professionally and personally. 73% of TAB Members reported greater sales and greater profit — but return on investment is only one part of the equation. 58% reported enjoying greater work/life balance, while an incredible 94% reported being able to better deal with people and organizational issues.

A Strong Solution to Employee Performance Issues

After nearly a year discussing TAB Boards with a TAB facilitator, Sandra Scanlon decided it was time to join The Alternative Board. She was quickly impressed by the commitment and accountability other TAB Members displayed, and she was able to draw upon their skills and issues for her people-and-performance issues.

"My chief issue was devising a way to manage people so as to improve their performance," Sandra says. "TAB Members helped guide me to design performance improvement plans that helped develop the skills of my most gifted employees and steer them toward higher levels of effectiveness."

Sandra Scanlon
SSG MEP
TAB Member since 2012

The Power of Giving

"I'm a big believer in the adage 'it's better to give than receive,'" says Glenn Franklin of Franklin, Gringer & Cohen — and it shows in his careful attention to clients. It's also what attracted him to TAB, where he's been a member since 2004. Other board members are free with their advice, not expecting anything in return, says Franklin. He credits them with everything from marketing and networking ideas to client referrals.

"TAB meetings are a breath of fresh air and have helped me think outside-the-box about a variety of issues," says Franklin. "TAB has contributed greatly to our success."

Glenn Franklin
Franklin, Gringer & Cohen (Legal Services)
Garden City, NY
Member since 2004

Is TAB for You?

The mission of The Alternative Board® (TAB) is to provide small business owners with peer advice from fellow business owners and coaching from experienced business professionals. TAB helps forward-thinking business owners grow their businesses, increase profitability and improve their lives by leveraging local business advisory boards, private business coaching and proprietary strategic services.

Becoming a member of The Alternative Board gives you access to resources and expert advice to help you create — and follow through on — a strategic social media plan. [Find a TAB Board](#) near you and begin growing your business today.

Was Business Coaches helpful to you? Help someone else out by forwarding to a colleague.