



FORGET GYM MEMBERSHIPS AND PARKING SPACES - CORPORATE HIGH-FLYERS ARE NOW DEMANDING A LIFE COACH AS PART OF THEIR SALARY PACKAGE.

You've got a personal assistant to steer you through the million-and-one tasks you have to do at the office. You've got a personal trainer to help you keep fit. Ah, but do you have a life coach?

A growing number of savvy executives in the USA and UK are negotiating a life coach as part of their salary package. They believe a weekly or fortnightly session with someone who can enhance their professional performance is just as important as an attractive salary, company car, gym membership or private pension plan. Now, life coaching is also becoming big business in Australia. Some major companies are recognising that people perform better when they feel supported, and are offering coaching to senior staff.

"Organisations are realising they can't just let people 'get on with things'. They have to have a strategy to support their staff," says Lindsay Tighe, founder of Inspirational Coaching in Melbourne. Originally from the UK, Tighe had spent most of her working life as a manager in the financial sector, before switching to a new career in life coaching three years ago.

"Some businesses are also realising that to attract high-calibre employees they have to offer strong support networks," Tighe adds. "The best graduates now leave university and ask, 'Why should I work for you?' They're not just interested in the salary. They see work-life balance as important and they want to know how an employer will help them achieve that balance."

About 80 percent of Tighe's clients are rushed executives with major responsibilities and tight deadlines. Juggling work and family commitments is their major headache.

"Coaching looks at how people use their time at work. Usually people think they have to do it all, but delegation relieves a lot of pressure," Tighe says. "Coaching also helps people break the 'I have to be seen at the office' mindset," she says. "Do you really have to be at the office 14 hours a day? Would it matter if you arrived at work at 9.30am once a week so you could take your children to school? Probably not."

Many busy execs get caught on the treadmill. They rush from project to project, and from boardroom meeting to briefing without stepping back >

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to appraise their performance or to tune in to staff morale - a dangerous oversight. Tighe uses a 360° review tool to analyse what clients are doing well and what isn't working.

"Clients get feedback from their managers, peers and the people who report to them to find out how they are perceived at all levels," Tighe explains. "If you don't do that you will probably continue to do something that is driving everyone else in your team crazy. Find out what other people define as your strengths and weaknesses and build on that information to improve your performance, as well as your workplace relationships."

Tighe takes a holistic approach to coaching. While boosting job performance is important, she believes achieving in the workplace goes hand in hand with a healthy body, a healthy diet and healthy personal relationships. "How many busy people don't take time out for lunch?" she asks. "They eat takeaway at their desk and don't even find time to go for a 20-minute walk

every day. They are mentally and physically drained, and get to the point of burnout. I encourage clients to make time for exercise at least four or five times a week. They actually put it in their diary because then they see it as another task they have to do during their working day - just like attending a meeting or finishing a report."

A life coach is also an objective and confidential sounding board, a tool for off-loading worries. Executives in senior positions may be reluctant to discuss their concerns with people within the organisation for fear of being seen as struggling to cope.

"A lot of busy people are overwhelmed with information and ideas, and need someone to help them focus and get mentally organised. A coach gives honest feedback, helping the client define their goals. Once those goals are identified, they are broken down into achievable steps," says David Rock, founder of Results Coaching Systems in Sydney. "Goals aren't always about work. Some clients want to get

fit, others want to write a book or have an art show. They realise they need to escape the stress of their job for the sake of their mental and physical wellbeing."

Rock emphasises that you don't have to be in hot water at work to benefit from coaching. Athletes who've achieved Olympic Gold or broken world records often continue to work with a life coach to hone their performance.

"In sport, having a life coach is seen as a mark of being serious about what you do," he says. "It's exactly the same in business. Life coaches are used by people who are already successful and who want to be more successful. A life coach will stretch, challenge and help you be the best you can be."

For information about Inspirational Coaching call (03) 9589 0709 or visit www.icoachu.com.au. For information about Results Coaching Systems call 1300 662 144 or visit www.resultslifecoaching.com.au