

A Company President Connects Executive Coaching to Effective Leadership

Ravila Gupta is president of [Umicore USA](#), a global materials technology company with 16 sites in North America. In my interview with her, which can be read in full [here](#), Gupta describes how executive coaching has helped her grow as a leader.

JJ: How would you describe executive coaching?

RG: It's not like sports where the coach analyzes you and tells you what to do differently. A good executive coach won't tell you what to do or provide you the solutions. Instead, he or she draws solutions out of you. An executive coach holds up a mirror that enables you to see yourself as you are, and as others see you. Through this process, you find answers from within.

JJ: How did you come to have an executive coach?

RG: After I was promoted to president, my boss said people in positions like mine need to have coaches. New to this concept, I didn't know what to expect. However, I can now say it's been incredibly valuable.

JJ: How so?

RG: Perhaps most important, I learned what constitutes true active listening. My inclination has been to jump in with solutions. Instead, I learned to stop myself and formulate questions that encourage employees to dig inside themselves. I learned how to listen not only to the words people speak but to the underlying values and emotions that are often hidden in what they say.

JJ: What have been the results?

RG: From observation and feedback, I've seen the change in my approach increase trust, team spirit and focus on company goals. Information is shared more readily, including unpleasant news that nevertheless needs to be shared. Employees have told me that even in our tough conversations on accountability, they feel I'm trying to help them as opposed to playing boss. I haven't lost any of my authority as president yet enjoy a great deal of collaboration.

JJ: What advice would you give other leaders?

RG: I would strongly encourage them to consider getting an executive coach. However, don't simply get a name off of the Internet. Get recommendations. Interview prospective coaches and ask them about their coaching philosophy and methodology. Have them describe what the coaching engagement would look like, including a typical session. If you take these steps, I predict you'll enjoy a return that substantially exceeds the investment.