

Impacting the Next Agricultural Leaders Through the Use of Executive Coaches

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Introduction/Need for Innovative Idea

The North Carolina Agricultural Leadership Development Program is a two-year program for early and mid-career agriculturalists to further develop their personal and professional leadership skills. While the program sessions provide in-depth leadership training through theoretical frameworks, case studies, domestic and international study tours, personal assessments, and networking opportunities, an evaluation of program alumni indicated the need for more discussion surrounding their own personal and professional goals and avenues to achieve those. In major corporations and industries, many higher-level executives employ executive coaches to assist in their leadership development and goal setting. In addition, these executive coaches work with their mentees to provide skill development needed to work effectively and cohesively within their environments as they strive to become strong leaders (Morgan, Harkins, & Goldsmith, 2011). In the past, the North Carolina Agricultural Leadership Development Program has utilized coaching but was sporadic in nature. Coaching only occurred following trainings such as Myers Briggs, Human Patterns, Emotional Intelligence, and Crucial Conversations and lasted less than an hour per participant. Individual coaches facilitated these sessions with little to no guidance. Based on evaluations, program leaders noticed that the coaching component was not providing the impact, nor the additional depth of discussion as hoped. For the current cohort, program leaders acquired a grant that provided funding for the hiring of a lead executive coach and additional executive coaches for the entirety of the program.

How It Works/Methodology

After program leaders acquired the grant to implement an executive coaching component, a lead executive coach was hired to plan and direct monthly hour-long sessions. Under the lead coach's direction and in collaboration with the ALDP leadership team, monthly coaching sessions were planned with specific goals and objectives in place. In total, seven executive coaches and one lead executive coach were hired. Each coach was assigned 2-5 individuals that they are committed to working with for two years. The lead executive coach communicates monthly with the executive coaches and shares topics and monthly assignments. This ensures that each program participant has a similar coaching experience. ALDP participants have met with their coaches monthly to develop personal mission statements, personal and professional leadership development plans, and engage in richer dialogue surrounding those topics discussed within the leadership sessions. While the coaching sessions are planned, the coach does have the flexibility to work with their mentees on specific items that are pertinent to the participant.

Results to Date/Implications

A mid-year evaluation occurred with both ALDP participants and executive coaches. This "check-in" engaged participants in a self-reflection and evaluation of the coaching component thus far and allowed the executive coaches to provide feedback on their mentee's

participation and share suggestions for improvement and future planning. Participants shared that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the coaching component. While many of the participants did indicate they had a “vision” for their future prior to the start of the ALDP, a strong majority shared that they did not have a mission statement, three identified long-term goals, nor a personal and professional leadership development plan. Except for two participants who have had their own unique set of personal and professional challenges, all participants have met with their executive coach once a month. Furthermore, the coaches emphasized that their mentees (except for the two) were prepared for coaching sessions and meeting goals and deadlines for specific tasks. One participant stated, “My participation in the program and my coaching experience gave me the confidence that I needed to leave my job and start my own business, a goal that I had for a long time.” Another participant stated “(He) has brought me out of the expectation that all information is handed to me and I will need to put in the work for my expected outcome.” Words and phrases such as “life changing” and “major impact” were present throughout the open-ended questions. As participants continue to work with their executive coaches, ALDP leaders are excited for the future outcomes and increased impacts that will continue to occur within (State) agriculture and communities.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Although the North Carolina ALDP executive coaching component is funded through a grant, it has made a significant impact on the participants and will be an added component for future programs. This does create a need for future grants and/or increased fundraising/sponsorship efforts. As learned through past cohorts, a lead executive coach is vital to the consistency and continuity of the coaching efforts. This ensures that each participant has a similar experience. In addition, program leaders should emphasize homework assignments associated with the coaching sessions during the leadership sessions. This provides support and value to the coaching component while encouraging participants to participate. In addition, time is allotted during the ALDP sessions for participants to work in small groups to discuss and share coaching components with one another, increasing accountability. Lastly, program directors should communicate and share the ALDP curriculum, recordings, and other session topics in the event that the participants want to discuss any of those items with their coach.

Cost/Resources Needed

The NC Tobacco Trust Fund Commission supported the executive coaching component of the NC ALDP by providing \$60,000. Most of the funds are used to pay for the monthly coaching sessions. One of the coaches donated their time to the program and two coaches are associated with the program and not paid through grant funds. Additionally, the lead executive coach is paid more due to their increased responsibilities and time. All executive coaches have prior experience with coaching and are familiar with the various personal assessments used within the program. A small amount of funds will cover travel expenses for each coach to attend graduation.

References

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