

EXECUTIVE COACHING



# A promotion can require letting go of the past

By Al Emid

**The coach** Susan Edwards, president of Burlington, Ont.-based Development by Design since 1996.

**Designations** Advanced corporate-coaching program from Steamboat Springs, Colo.-based Corporate Coach U, associate certified coach at Lexington, Ky.-based International Coach Federation and certified human resources professional with the Human Resources Association of Ontario.

**The client** Canadian Cardiovascular Society in Ottawa.

**Approach and philosophy** A new chief executive faces difficult tasks during the early months, including leaving behind parts of the past. "One of the typical situations you come across with a promotion is that people want to replicate what they've done in the past," Ms. Edwards said. "It's all about what they need to pick and what they need to let go of."

While working toward the corner office, an executive typically receives high praise for attention to detail, program execution and getting results. "All of a sudden, they hit this executive level and



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now need to get things done through others and to establish vision and direction," she said.

**Success story** When the CCS confirmed Anne Ferguson as chief executive in December, 2003, she became convinced her No. 1 issue was having former

colleagues reporting directly to her. This meant leaving behind program-management duties to take on broader responsibilities, such as the organization's financial and strategic success. "That required a bit more of an external view of the world," she said.

To free up time, Ms. Ferguson collaborated with Ms. Edwards to work through decisions such as organizational restructuring. Many staff members had reported to the previous chief executive. In the new structure, most reported to a director who, in turn, reported to Ms. Ferguson, a time-saving strategy that gave her the freedom to focus on representing the association in outside relationships.

Ms. Ferguson also had to leave behind the existing decision-making process with the organization's board of directors. The outgoing volunteer president wanted to be part of the decision-making process, which meant frequent back-and-forth messages and telephone calls leading to a decision.

The new president had a hectic schedule and wanted straightforward recommendations. "He was very busy and just wanted to confirm that decisions were sound," she said. With Ms. Edwards, Ms. Ferguson reworked the format of her communications with the president, producing a shorter, to-the-point format, with decision recommendations and support documentation, a move Ms. Ferguson contends increased the president's faith in her abilities.

**Return on investment** Ms. Ferguson said the coaching helped her "get up to speed" in her new role more quickly than otherwise, and make quicker decisions. "It's tough to leave behind all the other stuff."

**The bottom line** Ms. Edwards' fees range from \$4,500 to \$8,000 for a six-month coaching package.

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