Two of the University of Arizona's newest coaches don't work on a field, on a court or in a pool. They work in conference rooms, offices and anywhere else you're likely to find the people who run the UA.

Diane Brennan and Deborrah Himsel are senior leadership advisers who joined Human Resources in the fall to provide in-house executive coaching services to administrators and faculty and staff leaders.

Executive coaching is not a new concept, but it hasn't taken hold in academia as much as it has in the corporate world.

"Part of the reason this program was developed was to raise the level of awareness of just how critical leadership is," said Himsel, whose corporate experience includes senior leadership positions at Pfizer, Bankers Trust and Avon.

She and Brennan, who has a doctorate in behavioral health and has taught as Arizona State University in addition to her corporate experience, had worked with UA employees as consultants prior to being hired. Himsel is also an adjunct instructor in the Eller College of Management's Executive Education Program.

Through the years, Brennan and Himsel have worked with some clients who knew early in their careers they wanted to pursue a management track. Others ended up in management by default and may not have realized all that is involved in management or how to be a good leader.

"We have a responsibility and an opportunity to really help develop a culture of leadership as an institution," Himsel said. "Leadership development has always been a major part of my organizational work. I find it personally fulfilling and gratifying to see individuals and organizations grow and achieve their highest potential."

At the UA, leadership and executive coaching services are available to people in positions ranging from provost and senior vice presidents to department heads and shared governance leaders. (If you are unsure if you qualify for coaching, email Brennan or Himsel.) Brennan and Himsel estimate they already have worked with 65 people in seven months.

Brennan and Himsel offer several forms of coaching: individual, leadership feedback, transitional, on-call and peer. No matter which form coaching takes, the first step is the coaching agreement, which defines leadership and executive coaching as "a confidential partnership between coach and client based on mutual trust, honesty and commitment. The coaching process focuses on leadership development and learning that leads to increased individual and organizational results and supports sustainable effectiveness."
Coaching, the women say, is about change. Each client needs to be willing to devote time and energy to the process, which includes coaching sessions, self-reflection and personal work. In exchange, coaches listen, challenge and support clients to gain perspective and develop strategies to increase their impact as leaders.

"They have to do the work. It's about them," Brennan said. "Sometimes people will say, 'What advice do you have?' or 'What are you going to teach me?' And certainly, there is a lot of learning that happens. But it really is about doing this together."

Requests for coaching can come from supervisors, though many requests come directly from the people seeking the services for themselves.

"Just because somebody decides they want a coach, it doesn't mean something is wrong," Himsel said. "Somebody who wants to be more effective, who wants to drive more engagement with their team or individually, or who wants to be better prepared for whatever the next thing is that they're going to do can benefit from coaching."

In the course of coaching, Brennan and Himsel may identify other HR resources that could help, such as consulting for strategic planning or team building.

"We're finding really wonderful people here at the University," Himsel said, adding that the UA's coaching services are available outside of the main campus, including in Phoenix and at UA South. "People are interested. It's really fun to see so many good people here who want to do good work."

To spread the word about the new leadership and executive coaching program, Brennan and Himsel have been visiting colleges, schools and departments to give presentations about what coaching is and who can benefit. (Contact Brennan [6] or Himsel [7] to request a presentation.)

"We always say you cannot change other people. All you can change is you and how you approach other people," Brennan said. "If you change that, then in the end we all can potentially work together differently. We're here to support people and help strengthen their leadership. It is about helping people work better together so that everyone feels valued and engaged."

Human Resources offers other types of professional development services for employees who are not in positions that are eligible for executive coaching. Visit the HR website [9] for more information.

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