



What is Coaching?

Coaching involves dialogue between a coach and a client with the aim of helping the client obtain a fulfilling life. This is achieved by helping the client establish what is important to them and by clarifying their values. With the client's input the coach co-creates value-based goals and a plan to achieve them. Through collaboration, the coach supports the client to achieve these goals.

Coaching takes the form of a conversation between you and your coach. The coach will question you in a way that is deep and thought provoking. As a result, you discover how you are looking at the world, what inspires you, and what ideas or thoughts might be blocking your progress. You'll begin to see and think through things in a clearer and more balanced way. Powerful questioning and active listening on the part of the coach will help you develop action plans to help you achieve your goals.

Coaching blends the best concepts from business, psychology, philosophy, sports and spirituality. Although coaching combines skills from other disciplines, it is a distinct process of supporting others to create an ideal life. Coaches work with clients on a variety of topics: from business and professional issues to personal and spiritual concerns. A coach is an advocate, a sounding board, a cheerleader, an accountability partner, a truth teller and a supporter.

The [International Coach Federation](#) defines coaching in the following way:

“Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performances and enhance the quality of their lives.”

Coaches are trained to listen, to observe and to customize their approach to individual client needs. They seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.”

A coach offers many things to the client during the coaching process such as:

1. Support to discover the answers within him or herself
2. Clarification of values
3. Co-creation of a plan for how to achieve what the client really wants
4. A sounding board for new ideas
5. Support in making life changing decisions
6. Challenge to expand their views beyond their perceived limitations
7. Direction
8. Acknowledgment
9. Encouragement
10. Resource information

The Value of Coaching

Historically, there have always been “coaches”– the local priest, the shaman, an elder or some other respected person. Currently the field and practice of coaching is both growing and evolving. A number of trends – a younger workforce, a longer life span, a more entrepreneurial marketplace, less traditional jobs, technology, the growing field of neuroscience findings which clarify how and why people make changes.

However, the biggest reason for the field’s growth is that it works.

In a 2014 Global Coaching Client Study conducted on behalf of the [International Coach Federation](#) found that of those individuals who had received coaching:

- 80% saw improved self-confidence
- 73% saw improved relationships
- 72% saw improved communication skills
- 70% saw improved work performance
- 61% saw improved business management
- 57% saw improved time management

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- 51% saw improved team performance
 - And of those surveyed, 99% indicated that there were “somewhat or fully satisfied with their coaching experience” and 96% said they would do it again.

The Philosophy Behind Coaching

The underlying philosophy behind coaching is that we are resourceful and creative with energy, wisdom, ability and genius waiting to be set in motion. We can create the life we want faster and more easily by partnering with a coach who helps us utilize these resources to facilitate change and realize our potential.

Many of the early psychological theories (Adler, Jung, Ellis) and current theories such as Positive Psychology and the “solution focused” therapies are antecedents to modern day coaching. Instead of pathology as the main focus, these theories focus on behavior change through increased awareness and choices for desired future results and solutions to current problems in living, with the individual as the creator and artist of his or her life.

What Coaching is Not

More than one coach has used the bicycle analogy to describe what coaching is and is not. It helps us see the differences with some clarity.

Let’s say in life you can walk or ride a bicycle to your destination. You will get there quicker and with less stress if you rode instead of walked, right? Especially so if you have a motivating and supportive guide to explore options with, someone who points out a potential new path and then let’s you decide on the way to go.

Before you know it, you’re discovering new directions and pedaling toward an exciting destination with the wind in your hair and sun on your face. (Don’t forget the sunscreen).

This differs from a consultant who tells you where to sit and where to put your feet, when to pedal, and when to brake. And then leaves you on your own.

A therapist on the other hand explains why it is important for your self-esteem or psyche etc. to successfully ride the bike. And a mentor shares with you their experience or expertise of cycling and advises the most effective way they have found to ride one.

A coach first listens to your desire to try riding. The coach asks you if you need instructions on how to ride and asks where you might get them. The coach asks you to decide the color or kind of bike you want. The coach runs along side the bike “checking in” to see if you’re enjoying the experience and asks what might make it more fun. The coach might ask about your experience and what was valuable, and whether or not you want to pursue mastery of bike riding. If you do, the coach helps devise a plan where you can attain that mastery. If you don’t, then the coach may help you devise a plan to sell the bike.

Coaching and Therapy

So as the bike analogy shows, coaching is not therapy, counseling or psychology. Although intervention often follows some psychological models such as behavioral theory, the actual process of coaching should not be mistaken for a therapeutic intervention. One of the most obvious differences between the two approaches is that therapy tends to focus on feelings and experiences related to past events, whereas coaching is oriented towards goal setting and encourages the client to move forward. A therapist typically works with a dysfunctional person to get them to become functional. A coach works with a functional person to get them to become exceptional. Therapists typically work with people who need help to become emotionally healthy.

A coach works with people who are already emotionally healthy to move them to magnificent levels. Coaching does not rely on past issues for achieving growth, but rather focuses on goals towards the future. Coaching is action oriented. The focus is on where the client is right now, where they want to be next, and how to get them there.

If you are working in the past, then you are involved in therapy. If, the client is stuck and can’t seem to move forward or if there is a drug or alcohol problem, then you are more doing something other than coaching. Often starting a coaching process will help a client realize a need for therapy. Be alert. If you feel uncomfortable or uneasy about where the conversation is leading, tell your client. Part of being a good coach is knowing when and when not to coach. If the client needs therapy then refer them to a therapist.

Coaching and Consulting

Coaching is often likened to consulting. However, there are distinct differences between these disciplines. A consultant is usually a specialist in a given area. They are hired to give recommendations and provide solutions. A consultant works with a client to solve a particular problem or to address a specific issue. Once the problem is solved or the issue addressed, the consultant leaves. Generally, a consultant doesn't get involved with areas outside of their specialty. Coaching uses a more holistic approach. With the client, the coach examines the situation, creates a plan of action, and works side by side to resolve the issue. The coach does not have to be an expert in the client's business. The client is the expert. The coach collaborates with the client to create a solution using the client's knowledge and answers.

While people, and companies, will often choose a coach who has previous experience or expertise in the field that they work in, the coaching methodology does not require this. Consultants however, build their businesses around the knowledge they have gathered over time in the specific field in which they then offer consulting expertise. They are expected to provide advice, information and anecdotes about the field. The coach, on the other hand, does not have the answers and does not claim to have them. They have the questions that allow the client to find their own answers and clarify their own values.

Coaching and Mentoring

In general, a mentor is more experienced than the person being mentored. The mentor bestows their knowledge and wisdom while the mentee looks up to the mentor and seeks guidance and advice from him or her. There are both formal and informal mentoring relationships.

In a business setting, mentoring is a formal relationship that is established with someone who is an expert in his or her field. Like consulting, mentoring involves passing on the benefit of a set of specific experiences. A coaching relationship, on the other hand, is a partnership whereby the coach walks side by side with the client. The coach supports the client in drawing on his or her own wisdom and following their inner guidance.

The Difference Between an Executive, Corporate or Business Coach

The client is the distinguishing feature in the differences between Executive, Corporate or Business Coaches. Executive coaches work with executives, usually senior executives in medium to larger sized companies. They tend to be employed by the executive themselves or their companies. Either way they are most often brought in to coach on performance related or life/work/balance issues and most often take the role of strategic partner to the client.

Corporate coaches also work with executives, usually in medium to larger sized companies. However, they tend to be employed more often by the company and coach on company defined goals and targets. They also take the role of strategic partner to the client.

Business coaches work with small business owners, entrepreneurs and managers of business units in companies. Depending on the client, their role could be anything from life/work/balance to specific business building goals (for example, to increase sales by 50%).

Generally speaking corporate, business and executive coaches will have expertise in their area of coaching. Business coaches will have run a small business; executive coaches have often been CEO's or senior executives themselves. Although the coaching methodology does not demand this, there are two key reasons why it occurs:

1. It helps to have an empathy or understanding of where the client is coming from, particularly in relation to culture and language. A corporate coach who has never heard of key performance indicators, or doesn't know the elements of a strategic plan will be more challenged.
2. The second and main reason has to do with marketing. If you have education or expertise in a particular field, that field will likely find you a more 'credible' and trusted coach.

There is a saying in the coaching profession, "All coaching is life coaching after the first 3 sessions". You may have been brought in to double sales, but you may find the coaching sessions become about relationships, communication, family/work balance *and* doubling sales.

So it is entirely possible that a masterful life coach would do a great job coaching a senior executive. In fact, it is probably what he or she needs. But from a marketing perspective CEO's of companies like to employ people who have come from that culture. Likewise small business owners like to know that their coach understands what it is to run a small business.

Why Coach?

Coaching is a unique, new and exciting field. It is based on a core set of skills and practices, which apply to all coaching situations, with an opportunity to specialize in a niche area.

The International Coaching Academy programs are based around this model: a solid grounding in the core skills of coaching plus the opportunity to explore a niche area through study and networking with others.

Reflection

1. If you have previously worked in a field that is related to coaching, which of the skills you applied in that field are applicable to coaching? Which are not applicable to coaching?
2. When might you refer a client to a therapist or psychologist for counseling rather than continuing with coaching? How is coaching related to mentoring? How is it different? How could a business consultant alter their business to become a business
3. What is meant by the saying "all coaching is life coaching after the first three sessions"? Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not?

Resources

Conventional Therapy v. Personal Coaching

Comparison Chart

<http://www.coachville.com/rd/020102therapy.html>