
What is Coaching?

Coaching involves dialogue between a coach and a client with the aim of helping the client obtain a fulfilling life.

The Coach

Coaching blends the best concepts from business, psychology, philosophy, sports and spirituality. But, is a distinctly different process to that of a consultant, therapist or mentor. As a coach you will be an advocate, a sounding board, a cheerleader, an accountability partner, a truth teller and a supporter. You will help your clients to discover the answers within themselves and will provide the acknowledgement, encouragement and direction needed for them to:

- identify what is important
- establish value-based goals
- co create an action plan
- help create structures and accountability for success
- challenge their views beyond their perceived limitations

The Client

Most Coaches actually employ coaches for themselves, for their own personal or professional development. As a client you will have the opportunity to question things in a way that is deep and thought provoking. You will explore how you look at the world, what inspires you, and what ideas or thoughts might be blocking your progress. You will begin to see and think through things in a clearer and more balanced way. Your coach will listen intently and pose powerful questions that will help you develop action plans, create structures, be accountable and take action.



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.

International Coach Federation *Definition of Coaching*

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 behaviour 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.

The Bicycle Analogy

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 pedalling toward an exciting destination with the wind in your hair and sun on your face.

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 colour or kind of bike you want. The coach runs alongside 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, counselling or psychology. Although intervention often follows some psychological models such as behavioural 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 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. This is supported by a number of new trends – a younger workforce, a longer life span, a more entrepreneurial marketplace, less traditional jobs, technology, and the growing field of neuroscience findings which clarify how and why people make changes.

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.

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

The 2016 Global Study into Coaching conducted on behalf of the International Coach Federation found that of the coaches surveyed:

- 99% of coaches had active clients
- 83% of coaches had set up a coaching practice
- 17% of coaches were blending coaching with their leadership / management role
- The age of coaches was wide ranging with 46% under 50 and 54% over 50.
- 75% of coaches expected their number of coaching clients to increase over the next 12 months
- 29% of clients were Managers
- 32% of clients were Executives
- 19% of clients were looking for life / personal coaching
- 75% of coaches said they anticipated an increase in annual revenue from coaching.
- 99% of coaches had completed coach-specific training, with 89% having completed accredited or approved training through a professional training organisation
- 68% of those who had completed coach specific training had completed at least 125 hours

To learn more about the benefits of introducing coaching into your workplace, download the [ICF Global Study into Coaching](#). Specifically the [Coaching for Managers and Leaders fact sheet](#).

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>