

## **What Is Coaching, and Do You Need It?**

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Coaching is a relatively new field, although the concepts and tools used in coaching have been around for a long time. Executive coaching emerged in the 1980's as a way for companies to support their managers and leaders. From there, many different types of coaching have emerged such as personal or life coaching, small business coaching, parent coaching, career coaching, and even smaller niche specialties such as coaching those diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, writing coaches, and even coaches who help people go green (eco coaching).

Coaching is an incredibly dynamic field that is growing by leaps and bounds; however, it's not regulated. There is no educational standard or certification process to pass before becoming a coach. As alarming as it is, anyone can put their shingle out as a coach. In a moment I'll go over how to select a coach given this unfortunate lack of regulations, but first let's explore the purpose of coaching.

### **I have friends, so why do I need a coach?**

I was once asked why someone would need to pay a coach if there are friends and family members to turn to. I understood where she was coming from. It can seem odd to pay professionals for services that didn't even used to exist in our culture. However, her question speaks to a misunderstanding about what coaching is. Coaching is not simply listening, and it's not about giving advice. Some of the core competencies for coaching identified by the International Coach Federation are: powerful questioning, creating awareness, designing actions, planning and goal setting, managing progress, and accountability.

Coaching is a unique relationship unlike other helping relationships you may be familiar with. Coaching is a process of partnering together to clarify and manifest a specific change you want to make or a goal you want to achieve. Some of these may be concrete like a career transition or finding ways to live a dream you've always had. Others are more about ways of being: learning tools to become more centered, make decisions more clearly, and manage your energy in skilled ways to decrease stress and worry.

Have you ever been through a period in your life where you were talking to loved ones for months (or even years) about the same issue and getting nowhere? It's not for lack of caring or good intentions, but friends and family members may not know how to help. There are times when you could benefit from an objective person to help you through a transition in a skilled way, offering you tools and resources that come from your own strengths. Coaching is focused and forward-moving, specifically designed to shift you from one place to another.

### **What is coaching like?**

Perhaps you're tenderly holding a dream you've been thinking about for a long time. Or, maybe you've been feeling that something is missing in your life, or that you'd like your career to be better aligned with your core values. You might not know exactly what you want, but you have a good idea about what you *don't* want.

Whatever it may be that you want to create some change around, imagine what it would be like to tend to these issues in a new way with a coach who provides a road map for your journey. Imagine showing up for your first session, hopeful and maybe a little nervous. Imagine taking in questions that seem to get to the heart of the matter in no time at all. Imagine connecting with your deep desires, and realizing that what's been holding you back is something within your power to overcome.

Your coach will work with you to create inspired actions, assess what works and what doesn't, evaluate progress, and continue to build the external and internal resources toward manifesting

your goals. Coaching tends to be a relatively short-term process compared to therapy, but it is *not* a replacement for therapy. If you are depressed, anxious, or have other symptoms that are overwhelming you, you should talk to your family doctor, a healing practitioner, or therapist about options to best support your needs.

There are different styles and formats for coaching, depending on the coach. Sessions might be done over the phone or in person. Sessions may be 30 minutes long or up to an hour. Health insurance doesn't cover coaching, so you must pay out of pocket. Fees vary widely. The International Coach Federation published a study in 2007 that surveyed thousands of coaches worldwide. The average hourly fee was \$205. New coaches may charge as little as \$50 per hour, and it's not uncommon to pay qualified, experienced coaches anywhere from \$300-\$500 per session. Some coaches require clients to sign on for a package of sessions, rather than a "pay as you go" approach.

Some coaches offer groups and workshops either in person or over the phone (telecourses). These tend to be more affordable options than individual coaching, and can provide great resources for getting focused and started on your goals.

### **How do I find the right coach for me?**

Because no regulatory standard exists, it's all the more up to the consumer to thoroughly research options. Hiring a coach is an investment and you want to be sure you find the right person for the job.

There are three self-appointed, privately owned accreditation organizations: the International Coach Federation, the International Association of Coaching, and the European Coaching Institute. Although no independent body oversees these, they are each working to bring standards to the industry and offer directories to help you find a coach. Internet searches work well too. Be as specific as you can with your search terms. Ideally, get referrals from people you know. Coaching is becoming more common and it's likely that someone in your circle has either been coached or knows someone who has.

At the bare minimum, be sure that the coach you hire has actually been trained as a coach. Even if they come from a therapy or social work background, it's important that they have coach training. These days, everyone seems to be calling themselves a coach. People skills are great, but to be effective as a coach requires a unique skill set with extensive training and practice.

Aside from training and fees, here are some questions you may want to ask when interviewing coaches:

- How long have you been a coach?
- Is coaching your full time job?
- What results can I expect from our work together?
- Do you have a minimum number of sessions that you require?
- What's the average number of sessions that you find most effective?
- What's included in our work together? (unlimited email contact, short check-in calls, session summaries, etc.)
- Who are your ideal clients? Have you ever turned down a potential client?

Lastly, ask for testimonials. Most coaches have examples posted on their websites, but a referral is much more meaningful. Although coaching is confidential, coaches can obtain permission from former clients willing to be contacted about their experience. Ask if you can contact a couple of them.

Most coaches offer a free consultation of 15 minutes or more over the phone. Take advantage of these offers and shop around.

### **Once I find the right coach, how do I get the most out of the experience?**

1. Coaching is a commitment as well as an investment. Keep your appointments and do the work to the best of your ability.
2. Don't give up when the going gets tough. If you agreed to an action step but find it hard to complete it, hang in there. This is valuable information for both you and your coach. Exploring barriers and obstacles is part of the process.
3. Come to sessions prepared. I ask my clients to come with one or more of the following:
  - Challenges/problems they faced and how they handled them
  - Insights and new awareness they're excited about
  - Successes they'd like to celebrate and deepen
  - What they're currently working on and how it's going
  - Any guidance or clarity they desire
  - Skills they'd like to strengthen
4. Keep the lines of communication open with your coach. If you have concerns about your progress or the effectiveness of the coaching, let him or her know-- the sooner the better.

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*Finding a coach to walk beside you on your journey can be a deeply rewarding experience, guiding you toward your goals more quickly than you'd be able to on your own. In the end, you'll be left with a much better understanding of who you are, what this time in your life is about, and what it feels like to truly claim what you want.*