

Choosing a Coach

You continue to hear about friends and colleagues enlisting the support of a coach to help grow their businesses, enhance careers or make a change in their personal lives. What is all this talk about? What is coaching and how could a coach help you? Where do you find a coach? This article will help answer these questions and provide an outline on what to look for in a coach, as well as resources to find a coach that is a fit for you.

What is Coaching?

Coaching is defined as the co-creative relationship between a client and a coach that serves to transition the client from where they are to where they want to be. It is a catalyzing relationship that accelerates the process of great performance.

Coaching for business and personal performance is a relatively new field with the International Coaches Federation (ICF - <http://www.coachfederation.org>) celebrating its 15 year anniversary in 2010. As such, many people are unfamiliar with the nature of a coaching relationship. Consider it much like a coach you would have for sport. A coach provides guidance, structure, knowledge, advice and accountability, yet they cannot do the work for you. A coach helps you create and implement a development plan that works for you, whether for your business or personal life or both.

What is Coaching Not?

Coaching is often confused with consulting, and to add to the confusion, coaches sometimes serve in both roles. Here are some clues to differentiate coaching from consulting:

A coach asks	A consultant tells
A coach supports	A consultant prescribes
Coaching solutions are individualized	Consulting solutions are uniform
A coach is an expert strategist	A consultant is an expert in a field
In coaching, the client does the work	In consulting, the consultant prescribes while the client implements

One is not better than the other; however, you need to know what challenge you want to solve before hiring. Do you need a solution to a specific issue? A consultant would fill the bill. Are you looking to develop strategies to implement in your personal or professional life? Then a coach is what you are looking for. Once you have identified what you want to achieve, it is easier to know the type of support and the person who can provide it.

So, now you get the idea that a coach asks and supports you in developing solutions, sounding a little like a session with a therapist. The easiest way to differentiate coaching from therapy is that coaching is forward-based. That is, it is focused on making a difference in your future. Therapy can differ in its many forms, but

it often involves delving into the past and uncovering events or circumstances that are preventing you from moving forward. Coaching presumes that you are ready for forward movement. Should your work with a coach reveal the need for therapy or other counseling, a professional and ethical coach will refer you to an appropriate person for this need.

Who is a Coach?

There are several factors to consider in hiring a coach; however, there are two that take precedence: education and experience.

Just as you would hire any other professional, it pays to look for training and professional credentials. Coaching is a profession that has no licensing or certification requirements. That means anyone can print up a business card and call themselves “coach.” Many people think they make good coaches as friends, colleagues and family members often come to them for advice. Remember that advice-giving and coaching are two very different things! You want to look for a coach that, at a minimum, has completed a coach training program. While this is a good first step, you will need to ask about the length of the training program and on-going continuing education requirements. Coach training programs run the gamut from weekend courses to degree programs offered by universities. A coach that has been credentialed earns an even higher mark for professionalism. Click here for a [free guide](#) to hiring a coach published by the ICF.

The other important criterion is experience. How long has your coach been coaching professionally? What did they do prior to becoming a coach? Given that coaching is such a new field, most coaches have worked in another field or endeavor before becoming a coach. What is their experience and how can that benefit you?

To be effective, a coach does not have to been an expert in your field. Remember that you would want to hire a consultant that is an expert in your field. For coaching, you are looking for someone with a background that reflects an ability to strategize and to support you in reaching your goals. There are coaches whose background serves them very well in supporting clients in their field. Examples are a former attorney who now coaches attorneys or a financial advisor who now coaches other advisors. If you are looking for a coach with a specific background, start with professional associations for that industry or field as they may have reference information for coaches who specialize in that field or industry.

Where Do You Find a Coach?

Now that you know the support you are looking for will come from a professional coach, how do you find one? As with any professional search, a great place to start is by asking friends and colleagues if they know or have worked with any coaches. Personal recommendations can give you a feel for the coach’s approach and level of success. Know also that you may still need to ascertain whether the person recommended is truly a coach, not to be confused with a therapist or consultant. You have the advantage of knowing the difference. Your friend or colleague may not.

If your quest for personal recommendations turns up few leads, the Internet is chock full of resources. A quick Google search for “professional coach” yielded only 362 million results. There must be a way to narrow the search! Start with one of these online directories offered by professional associations for coaches:

- International Coach Federation (ICF) (coachfederation.org) – Coach Referral Service
<http://www.coachfederation.org/clients/crs/>
- Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC) (www.wabccoaches.com) - Coach Directory
<http://members.wabccoaches.com/members/source/custom/paDirectoryPublicSearch.cfm>

You may wish to limit your search to your geographical region if you prefer to work with a coach in person. However, many clients choose to work with a coach over the telephone, which broadens the field of potential coaches they can work with. You may wonder how this can work effectively, but a vast majority of coaching is conducted remotely. As you search for coaches to work with, you can also explore working remotely by interviewing a few coaches that are not located near you.

How will I know?

How will you know a coach is right for you? Considering that: (1) you have done your homework and identified what you want to be coached on, (2) you are ready for outside input and change, and (3) you've searched and narrowed the field to professionally trained coaches and perhaps ones specific to your industry - now it is all about chemistry. Much like dating or hiring any other professional, you need to feel a level of comfort and trust, a rapport. Yes, a coach can be the one to challenge you and kick you in the pants, yet they can only serve you effectively if there is a true partnership. Remember our earlier definition of coaching - it is a co-creative relationship between a client and a coach that serves to transition you - the client - from where you are to where you want to be. Let coaching be the catalyst for you to soar to higher heights!

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