

## First-Class Coaching

Coaching is a growing industry that covers personal and business coaching as well as the more traditional image of an authority figure with a stopwatch, whistle, and clipboard. In this short course, you'll find out what different types of coaches do, why you might want to consider working with a coach, and how to find a good coach, as well as what's involved in becoming a coach yourself.

### Introduction

In the last few years, you've probably noticed articles about "coaching" in more than one major magazine. On the Internet, hundreds of Web sites tout the advantages of working with a coach and sell programs that promise to train you to run a profitable coaching business. There's tons of information out there -- but it's not so easy to get to the heart of it. It's entirely possible, for example, to read though a dozen or more Web sites and still not know exactly what you can expect a coach to do.

One reason for all the confusion is that the term "coach" is used to describe a few closely related, yet different, professions. In this course, you'll first take a look at the general idea behind coaching, and then look at some of the specific types of services that coaches typically provide.

Back in the days when the self-help section of the bookstore was still just a dusty shelf or two, people had fewer life choices to make. It was easier to follow the clearly marked typical path to modest productivity and straightforward semi-success. But slowly, as personal wealth increased, people began to realize that they could strive for -- and reach -- greater heights, if they planned carefully.

Often, the first step was simply sitting down and clearly articulating life and professional goals. Simply acknowledging what they wanted from life spurred some people to take the actions necessary to achieve their goals.

The first coaches were often financial planners who helped clients realize that the things they wanted to do in retirement were things they already wanted to be doing. Some planners -- those with an ability to really listen to their clients' needs and wants -- began working with clients to create a reality that let them live their passions out before they were too old to enjoy these passions themselves.

The best coaches listen carefully to what you say -- and what you don't. They can help you learn to hear, above the clamor of things you need to do every day, what you really want to be doing.

These days, people are ready and willing to acknowledge that they want more from life -- and they want help getting it. Coaches -- who now typically undergo

some kind of professional training program before they begin working with clients -- fill that need.

### **Take Notes: The Different Kinds of Coaches**

Because coaching is a fairly new profession, it's still evolving and branching out. But, generally speaking, a coach is someone who helps you:

- Identify what you really want.
- Focus on the specific steps you need to take to get what you want.
- Set your goals high enough to truly challenge you to do more.
- Achieve those goals, even if you don't think you can do so on your own.
- Manage your time and resources more effectively to meet your goals faster.
- Constantly reevaluate your progress, recognize and applaud your achievement, and identify new goals for which to strive.

That said, there are a few different kinds of coaches -- or rather, coaches who specialize in a few different kinds of coaching.

*Personal coaches* work with you to realize your life goals. For example, you might want to create better personal relationships, improve your parenting skills, get along better with your friends and family, become more organized, or find ways to better manage your time or money. A personal coach might also help you work toward certain general professional goals, but usually will not offer business-specific advice.

*Business coaches* focus on helping you make positive changes in your business life. If you're self-employed or looking to start your own business, your coach can help you find the confidence you need to grow your business and make it more profitable. If you work for a company, a coach can help you work more successfully with others in your organization, increase your productivity, and earn promotions.

*Executive coaches* work with high-level individuals to help them work more efficiently and realize their personal and professional goals, which are often closely linked.

*Corporate coaches* are typically hired to help move a business forward by providing coaching services to individual employees. By helping employees work towards organizational goals, the entire company benefits.

### **Get organized: So . . . What Does a Coach Do?**

Even after you know what a coach generally is and does, the coaching concept can still be a little bit confusing to grasp. So let's take a look at a few things coaches don't do:

A coach doesn't act as a therapist. Traditional therapists focus on what causes your problems; a coach focuses on how to solve problems and move forward. It's true that you might spend a little bit of time working on interpersonal relationships, but you'll find more of a "top-down" approach in coaching. In a good coaching relationship, you won't spend months and months talking about the events in your past that have prevented you from succeeding. Instead, you'll most likely come away from one of your first sessions with a list of action items you can immediately begin implementing so that you can work toward success in the future.

A coach doesn't fixate on winning and losing. Instead, a coach helps you focus on doing your best. You'll strive to correct bad habits and to outperform yourself, but not to compete against or beat others around you.

A coach doesn't just blindly cheer you on or passively listen. Rather, a coach shows you the specific steps you need to take to be more successful. If you're making glaring mistakes, a good coach doesn't wait for you to realize what you're doing wrong -- he tells you right away.

A coach doesn't serve as a mentor. Your business coach might not even have any hands-on experience in your industry. What she does possess, however, is a keen understanding and awareness of the actions that drive successful people and how you can apply those actions to your daily business activities to produce tangible results.

By now, you're probably beginning to get a clearer picture of what a coach is and does. So let's take a moment to focus on the subtle differences between business and personal coaches:

Business coaches work with you to focus on business results. Generally, this translates to dollars earned -- either for you personally or for your company. Your coach helps you identify ways to increase your revenues without simply piling more work on yourself. It might sound like a cliché, but most good business coaches really show you how to work smarter, not harder. Usually, a business coach isn't concerned with your personal life -- except if your personal commitments are preventing you from reaching your stated work goals. For example, if you tell your coach that you want to spend one weekend a month scouting new locations for a retail shop, but you wind up spending all your weekends with your kids, a business coach encourages you to make your actions more in line with what you hope to achieve, business wise.

Personal coaches, as you might suspect, focus more on the total picture of your life. Yes, work is probably a part of that life (unless, of course, your last name is Hilton), but a personal coach most likely won't hone in on how you can earn more money at work. Rather, your coach helps you try to achieve balance in all areas of your life. If you look at the preceding example, where you shamelessly spent time with your children instead of working on the weekends, a coach would try to help you figure out if that's how you want to use your time. If weekend work is critical, a coach might help you figure out a way to get home earlier one evening each week to tuck your children into bed, to help keep all the different parts of your life working smoothly. There's some necessary overlap between the two kinds of coaches, as you can see -- and individual coaches have their own policies. You and your coach can work together to figure out what exactly you'll focus on in your sessions.

### **Find the Right Coach**

Once you know where to look, it's easy to find an abundance of business and personal coaches. What's not so easy is separating the wheat from the chaff. How are you supposed to sift through the sheer number of Web sites, brochures, and one-minute introductions at networking groups and find the coach who can help you live the life you dream of?

Well, for starters, make sure you're looking under the right rocks, so to speak. In other words, you don't necessarily want to hire the first coach whose name pops up from a Google search. Currently, coaching isn't a licensed profession (although it does provide certifications). Anyone can hang out a shingle and call himself a coach. So make sure the professional you're paying is, well, professional.

Here are a few of the places where you can find legitimate coaches.

The [ICF](#) (International Coach Federation) accredits coaches and provides a coach referral service. The [Find a Coach](#) Web site is part of CoachInc.com. The [Coach Training Alliance](#) has a certified coach program and software you can use to study coaching, as well as other helpful information. The [International Coach Academy](#) provides an extensive list of coaches as well as training programs. The [Academy for Coach Training](#) provides valuable information on how to find a coach.

As you look at individual coaches, you'll see that they're credentialed as one of the following:

- ACC (Associate Certified Coach)
- CPC (Certified Professional Coach)
- PCC (Professional Certified Coach)
- MCC (Master Certified Coach)

These credentials are given after the coach completes the requirements set forth by the ICF, the oldest and largest professional group that accredits coaches.

After you've found a coach who looks good on paper, you still need to make sure that the two of you can work effectively together. That's actually pretty easy to do: Nearly every legitimate coach offers a free initial session. That first session should be the same length and caliber as a regular, paid session. It's your chance to see just how the coach works, and if your styles are in synch.

### Look Your Best: A Typical Coaching Session

Nearly all coaches offer their sessions over the phone. Typically, you'll speak with your coach weekly for 30 to 60 minutes. Obviously each coach has her own style, but a typical call could move along these lines:

You greet each other, quickly review your long-term goals, and then state your goals for that session. Here's an example: "Mark, we're trying to grow your business and help you reach larger clients who can provide you with steady, challenging development work." "Right. Today I'd like to go over a few ways I can overcome resistance to my pricing structure, and I'd also like to talk about some additional ways of meeting potential clients."

Next, you'll address those issues in depth. You and your coach will go into detail about the topics that matter to you. Your coach will help you examine ideas for reaching your goals. If you were asked to prepare "homework" for your session, you'll go over it with your coach, as well as discuss the issues you've identified as important for your session.

Toward the end of your session, your coach may offer an assignment or suggest some exercises or action items to add to your to-do list. Your coach will probably also ask you to restate your immediate, short-term, and long-term goals.

Some coaches may be able to let you listen to a taped session with another client. This can be a great way to see how the coach works. Ask your potential coach if this is a possibility -- some clients will give permission for certain sessions to be shared with others.

Ultimately, you get from your coaching sessions -- and the entire experience -- what you put into it.

### **From Team Player to Coach**

If you begin working with a coach, you may eventually find yourself wondering what it would be like to walk in her shoes. The coaching profession is gaining popularity, and many people find it a highly satisfying and financially rewarding career. If you're interested in being a coach, you're most likely a people person.

That's obviously important. You also need to be a good listener -- the kind of person who really hears what people say and doesn't use his speech as time to think about what he's going to say next.

Listening skills are crucial. You need to be able to hear what people say -- and what they don't say, too.

Another important trait is flexibility. Your schedule will vary, for one, and you'll probably have the opportunity to work with different kinds of people from varied backgrounds with unique goals. Grace and understanding are crucial.

It's also important to remember that your clients make a commitment to you, and they'll expect to be treated in kind. You should be able to work within each client's budget and time restraints to make sure they get the best value for the time and money they spend with you, whether they only request a few sessions or wish to work with you long-term. A truly workable solution beats a quick fix every time -- and will vary for every client.

Of course, as with any self-employed position, you'll also need to be disciplined and organized. Clients who scheduled an appointment won't take kindly to it if you're out having coffee or if you've double-booked the session.

If you think you have what it takes to be a coach, you can explore the various training programs and find one that's right for you. Remember that ICF is the oldest and largest professional group that accredits coaches, so you want to be sure that the program you select meets its standards. The following Web sites can help you find a suitable program:

[Coach U](#)

[Academy for Coach Training](#)

[Coach Training Alliance](#)

[Coach for Life](#)

[The Coaches Training Institute](#)

You can also find more programs at the [ICF](#) Web site. Programs vary, but most accredited programs take about two years to complete.

### **Moving On**

Working as or with a coach can be enormously rewarding. To find out if coaching is really for you, try a sample session with an accredited coach. It's quite possible that your experience will mark a turning point in your life.