

Coaching: How to find out whether it's something for you

By Mario DiCioccio, MBA, CPCC



If you want greater success and satisfaction in your life or work, then you may want to consider working with a coach. But how do you know if coaching is right for you? Where do you start? And what can you expect from a coaching alliance?

If you find these questions lead you to more confusion than answers — you are not alone. The coaching industry itself is going through a metamorphosis and appears to be “professionalizing”

itself. But right now, coaching is a title, not a profession. So when looking for a coach, you are likely to find individual coaches with different or no certifications and different or no training as a coach; operating like consultants, teachers, therapists, drill sergeants, friends and mentors. Even for coaches operating like coaches, you are likely to find different niches including: executive coaching, developmental coaching, business coaching, life coaching and others.

Most coaching schools and professional organizations will define coaching as an alliance or partnership between the coach and the client, which can be an individual or group, that supports the client in defining and attaining goals.

Coaches are trained to be your ally and work with you confidentially. They help you attain greater success and satisfaction by focusing on your effectiveness and authenticity. Unlike consultants, coaches do not bring “the answer,” set “the goal” or do the work. Rather they help you to find your answer, set your goal and reach it.

Business leaders routinely use coaching to:

- Be more effective in their position.
- Identify and manage blind-spots in their skills.
- Focus and prioritize their work.
- Manage their life-work balance.
- Increase their satisfaction with work.
- Achieve their “next goal.”
- Develop new skills or enhance existing skills and challenge their logic.

While there are differences in approaches among coaches, there are some widely recognized functions that most coaches provide.

Most coaches work to get their clients “un-stuck” and energized. Through exercises, discussions and well-crafted questions, coaches can help their clients to better understand their current situation — often leaving their clients feeling more certain and more energized about taking their next step.

Most coaches help their clients to align their actions with their true desires. By providing ongoing feedback, a coach provides valuable information to their clients to: increase the congruence of their behavior, better understand “hidden conflicts” that inhibit progress

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and identify more fulfilling and self-motivating plans.

Also coaches typically use accountability structures to move their clients forward and build skills. New insights invariably lead to action. Action, or even attempting an action, leads to new insights. This action-insight loop helps clients move forward in a directed way. To keep this loop going between sessions, most coaches will use accountability structures that explicitly define what is to be done, in what timeframe and how the coach and client will communicate about it.

While a coach can help you define and navigate your change, there are things that you need to bring to the alliance.

You must be willing to search for and discuss your answers. While you can count on your coach to ask you provocative questions, you need to explore and discuss yourself, your options and your motivations in an open and honest manner.

You must have the willingness to act. Let's face it, if you want to make changes, you will need to change what you are doing. While a coach can help you craft new actions that meet your needs, in the end it is you that must act.

You must be committed to change. Coaches are aware that most clients experience a sag in enthusiasm along the way. Whether the obstacles causing these sags are real or perceived, they can derail clients from achieving their goals. It is through your commitment to change, that these obstacles can be addressed forthrightly.

Finally, you must bring with you some knowledge about what you need from a coach. If you are thinking of hiring a coach, chances are you are seeing some things that you cannot do for yourself. Exploring what you expect or want from a coach in different situations can help you select the right coach. Revisiting this question regularly once the coaching alliance has begun will help you and your coach have more meaningful and productive meetings.

Like all buying decision, there are other factors to consider in the coach you hire. Interview multiple coaches. Check into the background, training and references of each one. Most coaches are either certified by a professional organization, like the International Coach Federation (ICF) and/or their coaching school. Check out each organization on the Web and get a sense of their code of ethics, philosophy and methodologies. Ask references what they liked and disliked about their coaching experience? What did they achieve through their coaching alliance? This information, along with your understanding of the coaching process, will give you a sense of how each coach can meet your needs.

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