

Calling the Play

Coaches Are Not Just For Sports Anymore

by Nancy Gerber, Professional Certified Coach

Successful people know their strengths and capitalize on them. They are also shrewd enough to identify their weak spots and work on improving them. The fortunate ones find mentors who provide guidance and sound advice. Too often, we are compelled to struggle alone, attending classes, trainings, reading, continually searching for nuggets of practical wisdom and encouragement that seem to come too seldom for all the time and energy we're investing.

These days, if you're a savvy consumer, know yourself pretty well, and are willing to do a little research, you can find a mentor for hire who will partner with you to provide wherever professional assistance you need. This emerging field is called "coaching".

The International Coach Federation describes coaching as "an ongoing relationship, which focuses on clients taking action toward realizing their visions, goals, and desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client's level of awareness and responsibility, and provides the client with structure, support and feedback." In essence, coaching is behavior modification. We learn to replace old, self-defeating behaviors with new, self-enhancing ones. The goal is sustained improvement and growth through self-insight and an understanding of how our actions affect others.

Why do people hire a coach? Some are facing career transitions due to corporate downsizing, reorganization or relocation. Others are stuck at roadblocks in their communication, interpersonal, self-motivation, decision-making or problem solving skills; some just want to sharpen those they have. All want to more fully recognize, own and leverage their innate talents and strengths, and perhaps, to discover hidden gifts; to get into action and stay focused and on track.

The importance of coaching in today's mutating business climate is growing. Many organizations undergoing rapid change are seeing the wisdom of this cost effective and successful approach to helping valued, long-

term employees live up to their potential. Coaching assists people in developing more flexible and effective management styles; getting better in sync with organizational norms; communicating more effectively with co-workers, supervisors and subordinates; and improving interpersonal skills. It also contributes to reducing turnover and improving teamwork.

There are, as yet, no formalized regulations governing this international profession. Many coaches are self-taught, with backgrounds in counseling, psychology, human resources and business. There are now more than twenty coach training organizations in several countries whose enrollment and graduates are increasing exponentially. In 1999, the International Coach Federation implemented a voluntary credentialing process for member coaches.

These days, locating a coach is fairly simple. Finding the one best suited to you is a bit more challenging.

Most coaches offer a complimentary introductory session in person or by telephone. If you "click" right away, you will probably work well together. Remember that someone doesn't have to share your beliefs or philosophies in order for them to be a good fit, as long as they respect and honor you and are committed to helping you. Don't hesitate to ask for a resume and references from both colleagues and current or former clients. A fee schedule should be available upon request. Make sure any arrangements are treated as formal business transactions, placed in writing as necessary. Coaching can be accomplished in person, over the phone, even by fax or e-mail depending upon the needs of the client and options provided by the coach. Coaching sessions can be conducted for individuals or groups. Many coaches work with long-distance clients who found them through the Internet or referral. Training and membership organizations for coaches can provide you with information to further assist you in making your choice.

There are options in addition to professional coaches. Seek out and create a coaching partnership in your workplace, professional organization or business community. (Before approaching someone, be very clear about what help you need and what experience and skills you bring to the table. Make sure there is complete and open communication about the time commitment, length of the arrangement, expectations, and so on. Depending upon the situation, signing an informal written agreement can signify the importance of the arrangement.) Community programs, such as the University of Georgia Small Business Development Centers, provide group and individual assistance. Family and friends are often overlooked as excellent sources of knowledge, experience and honesty.

Coaching can also play an important role in our personal lives. Many of us already receive coaching in sports or creative

endeavors. Expand your thinking -- the opportunities are endless. Do you have a friend who's a great cook? Have them at you side as you prepare an important dinner. Next week, you can show them how to crochet a blanket for their new grandchild. Paperwork in chaos? Trade with your favorite anal retentive for dance lessons. Want to give your significant other a special gift? Hire a massage therapist to show you how it's done.

A successful coaching relationship helps us overcome the obstacles holding us back, and provides us with the practical knowledge and experience we need to improve and grow. The process focuses on skill development and on achieving concrete measurable results. We have a collaborator, partner and mentor in our corner. With our coach's help, we progress more quickly towards success than we would on our own.

Resources / References

Coach University
1-800-48COACH
<http://www.coachu.com>

The Coaches Training Institute
1-800-691-6008
<http://www.thecoaches.com>

International Coach Federation
1444 "I" Street NW; Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005
1-888-423-3131
<http://www.coachfederation.org/>
(coach referral service)

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