

What is personal coaching?

Coaching is a form of learning, where a person (a coach) supports someone else (sometimes called a coachee) to make progress in some way. Progress might include; to reach a goal, solve problems, or create learning and change. Coaching is normally a conversation, or series of conversations, one person has with another. The coach works to create a conversation that will benefit the other person, in a way that relates to their objectives. Coaching conversations might happen in different ways, and different environments. For example, in person, by telephone, over Skype etc.

How does coaching work?

An effective coach blends skills of questioning, listening, observation and feedback to create conversation rich in insight and learning. The coachee experiences a focus and attention on their own circumstances that helps them develop greater awareness and understanding. In addition, they'll also gain fresh ways to resolve issues, produce better results and achieve their goals more effectively.

Common benefits people experience from coaching include:

- Improved sense of direction & focus
- Accelerated learning around a distinct topic, e.g. managing people, relationship, influence
- Improved performance in an area, e.g. professionally, health, finances etc.
- Increased knowledge of self/self-awareness
- Improved personal effectiveness, e.g. focused effort on priorities
- Increased motivation or sense of personal engagement
- Increased resourcefulness/resilience, e.g. ability to handle change

What coaching is not

Coaching is none of the following:

Structured Training, e.g. classroom learning

Structured training relates to a fixed agenda of learning, and a prepared approach to make learning happen. For example, if you are being trained in a classroom to use a computer, the trainer would use a planned approach to ensure you learnt a certain amount of information, within a certain time frame.

Coaching follows a more flexible format, according to someone's objectives. Both the individual and the coach influence the direction and content of sessions. Coaching also places responsibility for learning on the individual and encourages learning to continue after the session, e.g. through an agreed set of actions.

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Coaching overview document

Therapy, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy

Some issues are best handled by someone trained to support a specific issue with a specific set of skills, principles and approach. For example, addiction or mental ill health (depression, compulsive disorders etc.) are best supported by someone trained in those specific situations.

Whilst coaching is not therapy, and is not viewed as therapy, it does provide a viable alternative to people who may have previously considered some form of counselling to resolve a situation. For example, milder forms of anxiety, crisis of confidence or self-doubt might all be effectively supported by a qualified and experienced coach. This is because coaching promotes a greater self-awareness, and fuller appreciation of our own situations and circumstances. Sometimes, we know our own answers and simply need support to implement our own solutions.

A way of someone else solving your problems for you

Coaching assumes that an individual is ultimately responsible for the results they're creating. Whilst you may argue that this is not always true, it is normally a more effective idea to operate from. If we acknowledge that we are responsible for something, it follows that we have power and influence over it.

For example, if you're not getting the results at work that you want, a coach might encourage you to:

- Understand that situation more clearly.
- Develop new ideas or approaches for those situations.
- Take constructive action that gets you the results you want.

What an effective coach will *not* do is instruct you to do something specific, or go and do it for you. If they did, the coach would be taking responsibility (and so power) away from you. An effective coach aims to empower you by supporting you to act, rather than acting on your behalf.

What you can expect from your coach

A coaching relationship is like no other, because of its combination of objective detachment and commitment to the goals of the individual. It's a distinct form of support; where someone creates a focus on your situations with an attention and commitment that you rarely experience anywhere else. An effective coach will listen to you, with a genuine curiosity to understand who you are, what you think and generally how you experience the world. They will also reflect back to you, with an objective assessment and challenge that creates real clarity.

Confidentiality

All qualified coaches have agreed to a code of ethics which protects the privacy of the people they coach and so the contents of coaching discussions is confidential. Where a third party has requested the coaching, e.g. as part of an organizational sponsored assignment, a coach will agree with you the best way to keep any interested third parties involved or updated.

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What your coach will expect from you

In return, your coach will encourage you to stay committed to the coaching process. That means showing up for sessions, taking your own notes where appropriate, and keeping any agreements you make during sessions.

In addition, your coach needs you to be open to the potential of coaching. That means contributing to conversations honestly and openly. The strength and power of coaching relates directly to the level of openness and trust in this relationship.

Prepare for coaching

It helps to consider your own objectives for coaching before you meet your coach. It's also a good idea to decide how you might increase the effectiveness of your coaching involvement, by reflecting on factors which may support that. The following questions can help:

1. What areas or topics might be most useful to work on with a coach? e.g. personal, professional, general learning and development?
2. What simple goals do you have right now which you'd like to make more progress with, e.g. to make something happen, or achieve something.
3. What learning and self-development goals do you have? e.g. get better at something or express certain qualities more (or less) often.
4. Of the factors under your own influence, what might stop your involvement with a coach from being successful? e.g. distractions or a tendency to procrastinate.
5. What thoughts are you having now about getting started with a coach?

Whilst the intention of the previous questions is simply to encourage your initial thoughts, you may also find that ideas, questions or actions arise from your thinking. That's great, simply make a note of those and take them to your first session with your coach.

Summary

Hopefully you now have a better understanding of the opportunity of coaching. Perhaps you've also reflected on your own situation and goals, and can imagine how coaching might support you.

Additional support & reading, all by Julie Starr

- The Coaching Manual
- Brilliant Coaching
- The Mentoring Manual

For additional information and free downloads, go to www.starrconsulting.co.uk