

# What You Need to Know About Coaching

By: Wilma J. Slenders, Ph.D.

It's trendy to have a coach. One of my clients said that people in his organization were starting to say "I've got to get me one of them," like coaching is the latest hot new thing that everyone wants. There may be some truth to that.

The term "coaching" is used a lot and there are many types of coaches including sports coaches, life coaches, career coaches, executive coaches, leadership coaches, and the list goes on. If you are considering engaging a coach, how would you choose one?

## ***What is Coaching?.***

The International Coach Federation (ICF), the global voice of the global coaching profession, defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Based on this definition, it seems that almost anyone can be a coach.

What differentiates a professional coach from everyone else? What should you look for in a professional coach? The following are attributes that I look for in a coach.

## ***Coach Education***

First, a professional coach should have received training from an accredited coaching organization. There are many different types of coach training organizations with different methods of presentation and different focus areas. An internet search will come up with different coach training schools. That's not to say that individuals who don't have coach training are not good coaches, but there is a method and style of coaching that is expected within the profession that comes with good quality training.

## ***Experience***

A good coach will have breadth and depth of experience in many different situations. For technical matters the coach may need to have in-depth industry or subject matter experience, however, for dealing with most people management, professional and personal development, and process improvement scenarios, this is not essential.

## ***Approach***

Excellent coaches bring knowledge and experience to the coaching relationship and know when to ask the right questions in order for you to explore the possibilities that exist. This coaching approach is based on the premise that individuals who seek and find their own answers are more committed to implementing the changes that are required. Some coaches may revert to an advice giving role or consulting role. Whether or not this is appropriate depends upon the situation, however, in these instances, the coach should declare his or her intent in changing the dynamics of the relationship.

### **Fit**

There needs to be a fit and synergy between the coach and the client; they need to establish a trusting relationship. This is not always instantaneous. Often it takes awhile to develop. At the start of the coaching relationship, the coach should discuss with the client what type of coaching relationship the client wants to have. Some people prefer an “in your face” type of style whereas others prefer a more gentle style. Your wishes should be respected, however your coach should be able to switch between styles depending on the situation and need.

### **Respect**

The coaching relationship is based on mutual trust and respect. It is not the coach’s role to judge you; rather it is to support you in order to make changes in your personal and professional life. If you do not feel comfortable with the coach’s approach or s/he says or does something that doesn’t feel right, you need to be able to discuss it openly and honestly.

### **Results**

Many coaches talk about clients’ results. It is important that clients make the progress that they want or need to make. However, it should be noted that the client is responsible and accountable for taking action. Clients “gotta wanna” make change happen. The coach’s role is to ask the right questions at the right time, and to support the client in taking action to make those changes. A Lao Tzu quote on leadership is apropos here: *“A leader is best when people barely know he exists. When his work is done, the aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”* It is similar for a coach.

### **Challenges Thinking**

One of the key roles of a coach is to challenge the client’s thinking leading to new insights and different perspectives. This can be done in a respectful and inviting manner. If, as a client in the coaching process, you are not thinking about your thinking and sometimes feeling a bit uncomfortable, your coach is likely not challenging you.

### **Confidentiality**

While it goes without saying, it is still worthwhile to note that a professional coach will maintain and respect the confidentiality of the client unless there is a mutual agreement that this will not be the case.

Coaches come in many different forms using a multitude of methods and approaches. It is YOUR choice and YOUR needs must be paramount. Coaching really is ALL ABOUT YOU!

### **About the Author**

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