

Agents of Success

BY JEANNE SCHAD

The growing numbers of professional coaches can provide career advice, help meet business goals—and just maybe change your life.

How do you make the link between sales training and selling from the heart? Success in business comes from training, experience and a lot of enthusiasm, but the most successful professionals are the ones who are truly genuine about what they're offering and know the world would be denied something wonderful if they didn't sell it to them.

Coaching has become a new way for professionals to get what they want. There are business coaches, life coaches, career coaches, sales coaches and weight-loss coaches—if you have a goal, there's a coach out there who claims to help you get there.

I am a professional coach who specializes in matching coaches to coaching opportunities in organizations. Coaching is a second career for me after working for 14 years in media as a radio on-air talent, an account manager for ad agencies and in national radio sales. In these environments, I was responsible for finding my own way in my career. Though I had supportive managers, they weren't always an objective source to help me map and navigate a job

and set a clear path to success.

Coaching can provide that objective help. When I first discovered coaching about four years ago, I saw clearly how a coach could have made my career easier and more enjoyable. Since having hired my own coach, I've launched my own coaching company, moved cross-country, met my future husband and left 30 pounds behind along the way. Having a coach helped me clarify what I wanted and then accomplish it. I managed to achieve things I'd tried for years to do on my own with less success.

Coaches have helped tens of thousands of people make amazing shifts in business and in their personal lives. Here are a few ways it can work for you.

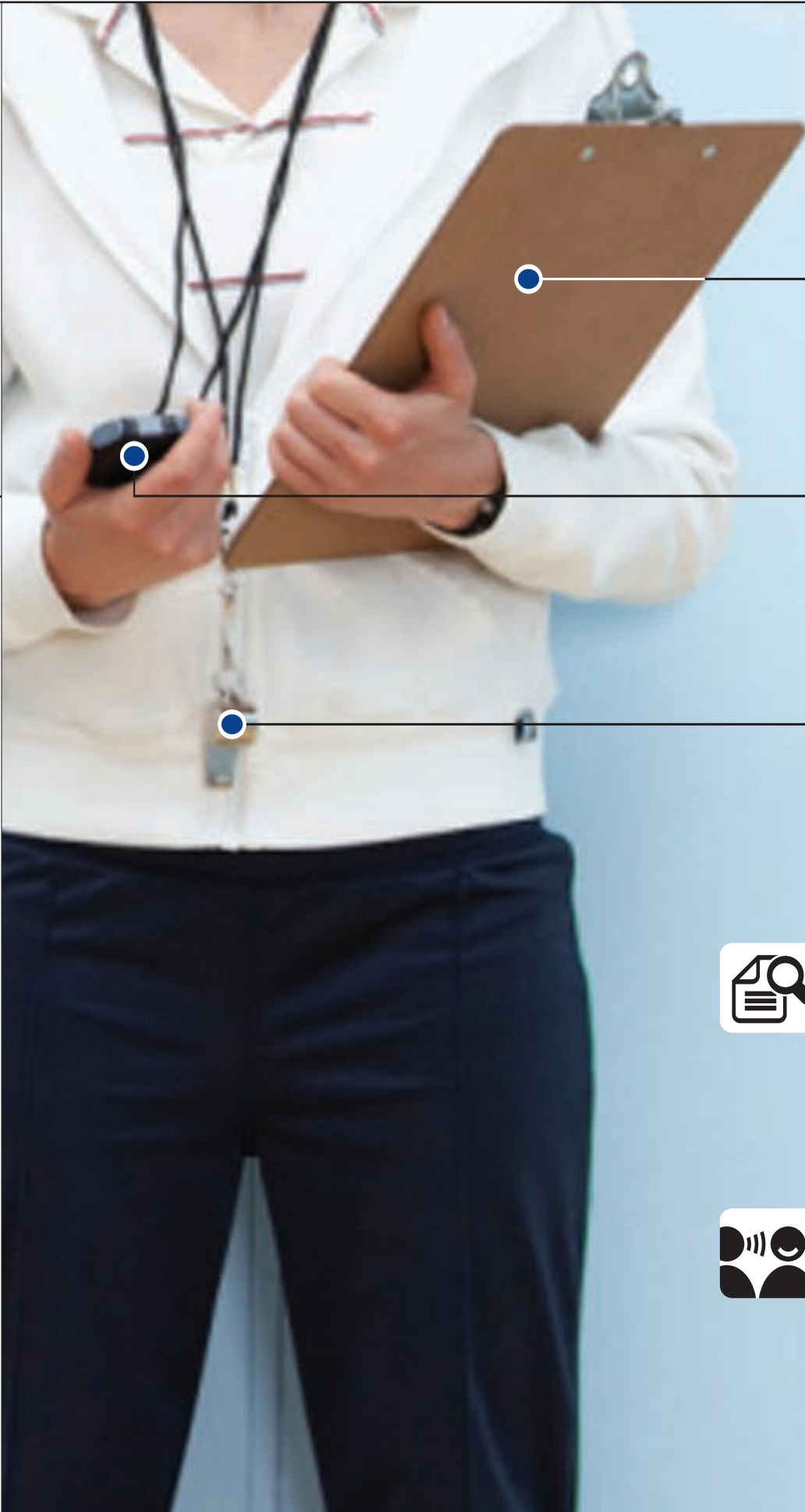
Defining Coaching

The International Coach Federation defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.” A good coach will establish trust, help the client learn more about himself or herself, and

help that client accomplish their goals. It's done through active listening, direct communication, providing feedback and asking powerful questions.

A coach who subscribes to the ICF code of ethics will follow the client's goals and desires and help them manage progress and accountability. A coach is not a therapist (who deals with mental illness), business consultant (who advises you on what to do), or motivational speaker (who pumps you up or cheers you on). While coaching can have some of the same effects, the approach is solid, grounded and based on the assumption that the client is capable, resourceful and has the answers. A coach is an expert in a process to help people gain a deeper understanding about themselves and move forward in whatever action they want to take. Here are a few things a coach can help you accomplish:

- Design a career path and an action plan to follow it
- Resolve personal or workplace conflicts
- Raise awareness and shift perspective on an issue



A Good Coach

Training and credentialing

Several organizations define and clarify what kinds of coaching people do and the standards and practices they follow.

Pace

Be sure the coach you hire is able to work at your speed.

Coaching tools and models

Personality assessments, 360-degree interviews of people in your environment, books, games and toys are all tapped by coaches to help them with their clients.



Background

Knowing the coach's past professional life will help you find a good fit, especially if you're hiring a coach to work through career challenges.



Personality and style

Finding a personality that fits you and your coaching goals will make the process faster—and much more fun.

- Balance work and home demands
- Increase joy and reduce anxiety
- Transition through change (downsizing, mergers, buyouts, layoffs)

In business development, the bottom-line results of coaching can be increased sales, higher productivity, less downtime, fewer sick days or creating an atmosphere where people want to work and are internally motivated.

Coaching can take place in many different ways: in person, over the phone and even in online forums. Coaching by telephone is the most popular approach and can be extremely effective. I was skeptical of coaching by telephone when I hired my first coach a few years ago. I was living in Dallas and initially insisted on finding a local coach so we could meet face-to-face. I ended up hiring a coach in New Jersey and, three weeks after hiring her, got an offer to transfer from Dallas to Los Angeles. In the end, phone

and the client has to respect that the coach has something to offer.

Long-term outlook. Lasting change usually doesn't happen in a day-long seminar or weekend workshop. The most successful coaching works through weeks, months—and sometimes longer—to integrate new learning and new approaches into the client's life.

Fit. Without a good fit, coaching can flail and falter without creating lasting change. Like choosing a new doctor, picking a coach involves evaluating a combination of hard skills and training and softer skills like style and manner.

What Makes a Good Coach

There are 30,000 coaches in the world. A few factors can help differentiate them from each other:

Training and credentialing. Anybody can call himself or herself a coach. Training or credentialing helps clarify what kind of

were certified training or credential programs and never bothered to get them. I've also met some highly trained and credentialed coaches I wouldn't want to work with. Credentialing and training is one means of comparing coaches, but should not be the only one.

Background before coaching. As a fairly young profession, most coaches come into coaching after a career in another field. Knowing the coach's past professional life will help you find a good fit, especially if you're hiring a coach to work through career challenges. An investment banker with an eye on a VP title and corner office may be ill-suited for a coach who was a former kindergarten teacher. Finding a former VP-level investment banker would allow this ambitious professional to gain insight from the coach's life experience.

Personality, wit, humor, and style. This factor is going to make the difference between craving a session with your coach,

{Coaching can take place in many different ways: in person, over the phone and even in online forums. Coaching by telephone is the most popular approach and can be extremely effective.}

coaching allowed me to work with a coach who was a good match and fit our sessions into my busy moving and travel schedule. Several coaches are now experimenting with coaching online via video chats; if this is a forum you're familiar with and comfortable in, then coaching through that medium might work well for you.

What Makes Coaching Successful

The ultimate success of a coaching engagement depends on a few important factors.

Motivation. Coaching is a process where the client does the work and is responsible for the outcome; the coach simply draws the best from the client. More than anything else, that client must be motivated to make a shift. If the client really doesn't want to do things differently, coaching won't work.

Trust and respect. Clients must be comfortable openly and honestly sharing. The coach must respect the client's confidences,

coaching they do and what standards and practices they follow. Several organizations define and organize what it means to be a coach.

The International Coach Federation (www.coachfederation.org) is the largest and certifies training programs that follow the ICF code of ethics. In addition to training, the ICF offers three levels of credentialing: ACC (Associate Certified Coach), PCC (Professional Certified Coach) and MCC (Master Certified Coach). Coaches who hold these credentials must be continuously training and have various levels of documented hourly coaching. The International Association of Coaching (www.certifiedcoach.org) also offers a certification program based on a review of a coach's mastery of coaching skills by a group of peer coaches.

Training or credentialing alone does not make a great coach. I've met many effective coaches who were coaching before there

tolerating it—or worse yet, dreading it. As a coach, I tend to be irreverent, direct, and use my offbeat sense of humor. As a result, my clients tend to be creative, non-conformist, and open to being brave. I am not as effective in coaching people who like to adhere to rules and think in literal terms. Finding a personality that fits you and your coaching goals will make the process faster—and much more fun.

Pace. Are you a 100-meter sprinter or a marathon runner? Do you want an immediate change in the next three weeks of your life, or are you looking for long-term joy improvement and stress reduction? Be sure the coach you hire is able to work at your speed.

Coaching tools and models. There's a ton of great learning that coaches can use to help a client reach his or her goals. Personality assessments, 360-degree interviews of people in your environment, books, games and toys are all tapped by coaches to help



Coaching FAQs by Media Professionals

As a coach with a background in media and advertising, I still operate in these circles and socialize with people from the industry. Among media professionals, I've heard several persistent questions and concerns:

"What if the coach tells me to leave my job?"

By far, this is the biggest question I get. In truth, a coach will never make you do anything you don't want to do. In fact, a coach will rarely tell you to do anything at all. You might realize you're not well matched at your job and evaluate that against the big picture (possible changes in the organization, opportunities for advancement, family responsibilities). Your coach will support whatever action you decide to take, even if it's staying put because you need to pay the bills.

"I know how to do this stuff. Why do I need to hire somebody to tell me?" If that's the case, congratulations. More likely, though, you may know yourself very well but still not be moving forward toward a goal. A coach can help you get from where you are to where you want to be faster and easier than going it alone.

"I can't afford coaching." This is the most commonly cited objection. But you have a choice where to spend your money. Some of my most motivated clients are the ones with the fewest resources. I hired a coach when I didn't think I could afford it; within weeks, I was offered a promotion with more than enough money to cover the coaching. Think about the places you spend your money, what results they have on your life, and where your peace and happiness fall in those priorities.

them with their clients. Be sure your coach has the tools you need for your coaching goals. A nail can certainly be pounded in by a buzz saw, but a hammer does the trick much more easily.

Finding a Coach

As coaching evolves as a profession, the process of finding a coach is still being defined. Finding the right coach takes a little research, but getting the right match is well worth the time and effort. Most coaches are entrepreneurs and operate as sole proprietors or in small partnerships with other coaches. There are very few central sources offering choices of coaches—a fact that inspired me to establish my firm. Yet there are plenty of coaches hungry for work, and several places you can go to find them.

The International Coach Federation's Web site (www.coachfederation.org) has a search tool to help people find coaches. Coaches listed on the site are ICF members who have paid to be included in the search tool. It's a good place to start, but not 100 percent accurate. I was recently looking for coaches with military experience for a project and used this tool to search for "LA" and "military experience." The search results returned coaches in the Los Angeles area, though many of them were people I knew did not have military experience. Beware that the search tool might not let you get very specific.

A few online directory sites can link you to multiple coaches. However, most have an affiliation to a training program or a certain coaching model that might not give you objective access to a full range of coaches. For instance, a Web site called findacoach.com lists only coaches who are graduates of Coach U, the training program that funds the site. Other sites look like directories but are actually franchise marketing tools. Be aware of how coaches are included in these sites and judge those criteria against your own.

You can also do a Google search, though the results may range from business or life coaching to bus transportation, sports coaches, or even handbags. Be specific. Include the industry you want the coach to come from in order to narrow your results. Be aware that you'll find coaches who may know something about search engine opti-

mization and marketing but may not necessarily be good coaches.

Like finding a dentist or a doctor, referrals from friends and neighbors are a great way to find coaches. When you start asking around, you may be surprised how many people you know are using coaches. Finding a coach this way also allows you to tap into that coach's network. Most coaches are pretty honest about what they do and don't do well, so if they know somebody who can better help you, chances are you'll be referred to someone who specializes in your situation.

Regardless of how you find a coach, you should conduct an individual interview before committing. Treat hiring a coach as you would any new employee or vendor. Get references. Ask questions. Be sure you're comfortable with them. Many coaches will offer to do a sample session; taking a test drive will give you the best idea of whether a coach is a good fit for you.

When I hired my first coach a few years ago, I did sample sessions with two coaches who looked equally good on paper. The first coach was soft-spoken over the phone and really seemed most interested in not offending me. As a result, our coaching session was very safe and predictable, like dinner at a chain restaurant, and I was left feeling that I wanted more. With the other coach, I had an instant rapport and a fun coaching session. She asked me very direct questions and challenged me on a few contradictory things I said. I also remember getting the impression she was a confident person who I could really learn from and hired her as a result.

Coaching can be an incredibly effective tool to help you achieve your highest level of success, however you choose to define it. Finding the right coach will create trust and make the process work faster. From there, it's up to you to be ready and open to new possibilities. A new job, being happier at your current job, a different career, new relationships, throwing out old baggage, and being your best and happiest self are all real results people have seen from coaching. 🗣️

A former VP-level media sales professional, Jeanne Schad is founder of Internal Relations Professional Coaching Resource (www.internalrelations.com). She can be reached at jschad@internalrelations.com.