

# Professional Coaching: How to Get on Top, Stay There and Enjoy the View

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**Professional coaching** is one of the fastest growing and most misunderstood professions of this decade. Coaching used to be an “executive perk” for large company executives to help them make better business decisions. Today, coaching is rapidly being recognized as one of the best strategic weapons a company can have in its arsenal. And for good reason.

Today's work culture is in “do-it-now, get-it-there-yesterday, stay-on-top-of-tomorrow” fire drill mode and organizations are increasingly asking for help. The employees bring issues to the boss, but who does she take her problems to? I doubt if the CEO is eager to share her fears with colleagues, competitors, staff, or financial backers. She could confide in a friend or relative, but they're likely to try to console her rather than delivering the “hard truth” that ultimately will guide her to a solution that elicits peak performance. A coach only has one item on her agenda – the client's success. This means going where it might hurt, and keeping a client accountable to achieving their goals. Coaching helps people grow personally and as professionals. This growth allows them to commit completely to the success of an organization. When professional coaches work with organizations they can turn performance management into a collaborative process that benefits both the employee and the organization.

## Who Benefits From Coaching?

Perhaps the better question is, who doesn't? We have all had managers and clients whose leadership, team-building, change management, or interpersonal skills are non-existent. The primary goal of coaching is to help people become more effective. Coaches work with individuals to help them overcome personal obstacles, maximize their strengths, and tap into their full potential. Still, the greatest value of coaching, aren't just the business solutions, but the personal insight. An individual may think they are hiring a coach to help increase revenue, but what they will ultimately get is a big dose of self-awareness too.

In today's economic environment where organizations are rapidly evolving, coaching can have a significant strategic impact. Unlike typical training and development, coaching provides continuous learning and develops people to meet current and future needs. Coaching is an investment that you make in developing your key resource people for the long-term benefit of your organization. A study done by Public Personnel Management Magazine, states that “training alone increased productivity by 22.4 percent, but when paired with coaching, the figure soared to 88 percent.”

*“The goal of coaching is the goal of good management: to make the most of an organization's valuable resources.”*

- Harvard Business Review

## The Difference Between Coaching, Managing, Consulting & Training

According to the Coaches Training Institute in San Rafael, CA, coaching, managing, consulting and training are all related, and sometimes overlap. However, at their foundation, they are distinct in their focus of attention.

A *professional coach's* primary attention is to tap into the client's own vision, wisdom and directed action in service of the client's self-identified agenda. The client applies himself/herself to his/her whole life usually including, and often focusing on their professional endeavors.

A *manager's* primary attention is to achieve specific organizational results through their direct reports. To that end, they may direct and/or develop those direct reports through performance feedback and may use coaching skills.

A *consultant's* primary attention is to achieving organizational results (often large systems change) through the application of specific expertise. They may or may not also be charged with transferring knowledge or a skill set to their client.

A *training and development professional's* primary attention is the successful transfer of specific information or skills to their clients. Again, a trainer may well use a co-active approach and coaching skills.

### **The Results of Coaching Are Quantitative**

*"Across corporate America, coaching sessions at many companies have become as routine for executives as budget forecasts and quota meetings."*

- Investor's Business Daily

Manchester Inc. recently released the results of a study that quantifies the business impact of external executive coaching. The study included 100 executives, mostly from Fortune 1000 companies. Companies that provided coaching to their executives realized improvements in productivity, quality, organizational strength, customer service, and shareholder value. They received fewer customer complaints, and were more likely to retain executives who had been coached.

In addition, a company's investment in providing coaching to its executives realized an average return on investment (ROI) of almost *six times* the cost of the coaching.

Among the benefits to the companies that provided coaching:

- Productivity (reported by 53% of executives)
- Quality (48%)
- Organizational strength (48%)
- Customer service (39%)
- Reducing customer complaints (34%)
- Retaining executives who received coaching (32%)
- Cost reductions (23%)
- Bottom-line profitability (22%)

Among the benefits to executives who received coaching were improved:

- Working relationships with direct reports (reported by 77% of executives)
- Working relationships with immediate supervisors (71%)
- Teamwork (67%)
- Working relationships with peers (63%)
- Job satisfaction (61%)
- Conflict reduction (52%)
- Organizational commitment (44%)
- Working relationships with clients (37%)

### **How to Engage a Coach**

Today, there are approximately 20,000 full-time coaches practice worldwide, about three-quarters of them in the United States, according to the International Coach Federation (ICF), coaching's credentialing organization. There are many types of coaches and many different specialties including: Life, Business, Executive, HDD, Health, and Financial.

Many coaches offer a complimentary "sample" coaching session to see if there is synergy between their coaching and your goals. If an individual is paying, he or she may be looking at anywhere from \$250 to \$500 a month, and a three-month commitment. The coachee buys three to four half-hour or 45-minute sessions a month (usually done over the phone) and usually a number of unscheduled phone calls -- often prompted by the desire for immediate advice -- to the coach. The consultations are confidential. In most cases, coach and coachee never meet in person. The corporate tab usually comes in at \$5,000 to \$10,000 for a typical six-month contract. (Many coaches do not work on an hourly fee basis.)

As the profession grows, an increasing concern is the number of un-trained professionals that are calling themselves coaches, so choose carefully. Make sure your coach is trained. There are several coach training schools including The Coaches Training Institute, CoachU and Coachville. You can search for a coach at [www.coachfederation.com](http://www.coachfederation.com).

The ICF recommends following these Coach Selection Recommendations, as well:

1. Educate yourself about coaching. Hundreds of articles have been written about it in the last 3-5 years.
2. Know your objectives for working with a coach.
3. Interview three coaches before you decide on one. Ask them about their experience, qualifications, skills, and ask for at least two references.
4. Remember, coaching is an important relationship. There should be a connection between you and the coach that "feels" right to you.

To your success!

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