

Getting the Most from your Coach – Briefing Pack

What is a coach?

A coach is a trained professional who uses various coaching methods, models and questions to help you achieve your goals.

A coach is different from a counsellor or a therapist, in that the focus is on moving forward, not necessarily to explore your past and uncover reasons for any problems in your life.

You may think that you can get the support you need from a good friend, however coaches do more than listen to you explain your problems, obstacles and wants. A coach will identify how you are currently thinking and behaving, and use this information to set you actions that will enable you to literally 'think outside the box' and move forward on areas of your life that you have previously struggled with.

Many coaches will specialise in a certain area, such as career, relationships or business. Some offer a more holistic 'life coach' service. Which is right for you depends on your particular reason for wanting to be coached.

Choosing the right coach for you

The coaching industry is relatively new and growing quickly, so there may be many people offering coaching services for you to choose from. Be sure your coach has the right level of experience as well as a professional qualification in coaching. Many coaches will have come from a related background, such as consultancy or counselling. As the profession of coaching becomes more established and professional, more and more coaches are becoming accredited and are investing in a form of supervision which acts as a 'quality check' to their work. Most coaches will advertise their services on an online directory or social media platform, such as Linked In, and you should be able to see reviews and recommendations about this coach from satisfied clients.

Questions to ask:

- How long have you been a coach for?
- How many paid clients have you worked with so far?
- Do you have a satisfied customer I could speak to as a reference? (Whether this is possible may depend on the nature of the coach's specialism)
- Where did you train?
- How long was the training?
- What makes you different to other coaches?
- Are you or do you plan to become accredited?
- Do you have a supervisor or are you planning to do so?

Going with your instinct

As well as looking at the logical factors, probably the most important thing is how you 'click' with the coach, so make sure you spend some time in general discussion to see how good the rapport is between you. Some coaches will offer a free or low cost chemistry session for you both to discover how much of a good 'fit' you are together. The coach will probably start asking you questions, which will give you a sense of their style, ie. hard hitting, caring, perceptive, enigmatic, direct, competent, professional, spiritual, creative, etc.

First session

The initial session gives you a further opportunity to consider whether this particular coach is right for you on an ongoing basis. At the end of the session, ask yourself:

- What have I learnt from that session?
- Has anything changed for me now?
- What did the coach ask that made me think in a different way to how I have thought before?
- How comfortable do I feel with the coach?
- How clear am I on how this coach may help me to achieve my goals?

Don't expect miracles in the first session. It takes a little while for the coach to get to know you and find what technique may suit you best.

Agreeing to work with a coach

Most professional coaches will ask you to sign an agreement, and probably ask for some money up front. You may be able to 'pay as you go', but to see the real value from coaching, you may need to commit to a set number of sessions over a period of time, ie. one per

fortnight for three months or one per month for a year. Be sure on what you have committed to and any cancellation clauses or money-back guarantees.

Face-to-face, telephone or online?

Many coaches will work with a client by telephone, through an online call option (such as Skype) as well as face-to-face. This could be really time saving for you and the coach, as no travelling time is required. Although the rapport may not be so strong without the face-to-face contact, many coaches say that this means issues and problems are addressed more head-on, and the anonymity means that honest, open communication is easier to achieve. You may also find that being in your own environment, at home or work, in familiar surroundings could also help you to be more relaxed and take more risks.

Most coaches will offer you a choice of face-to-face, Skype or telephone. Choose what feels right to you and be prepared to experiment. Using different forms of communication across different sessions, with email contact and written exercises in between would provide a comprehensive contact strategy, for instance.

Being clear on what you want to achieve

The first aim of your coaching is likely to be to clearly define an outcome for your coaching sessions. Some people have a very clear idea on what they want. Perhaps they have struggled for many years failing to achieve that outcome, or maybe this is a new goal and they need help to work out new steps or strategies to achieve it. Others have a distinct sense of the problem or issue, but not much of an idea of what they want to have happen instead.

You can't move forward without having a focused, clearly defined goal to provide you with a direction for that movement.

The clearer you are on what outcome (s) you want, the faster your coach can help move you forward (in general, but there will always be the exception to that!).

Take some time before your session with your coach to ask yourself the question:

“What would I like to have happen?”

Apply this question to the coaching session itself, as well as your longer-term goals.

Write down the answers to these questions and share them with your coach at the beginning of your session.

Taking Action

Most coaching sessions will conclude with the coach gaining your commitment to carry out certain actions. If there are any actions that you are not sure you can or will be able to do, say so at the time rather than wait until the next coaching session. The actions are for you, not to please your coach!

Write your actions down during or immediately after the session, and keep the paper or notebook where you wrote them down somewhere memorable, to prompt you to notice them and carry out the actions.

Keeping all your coaching actions, insights and thoughts in one notebook is a really good idea, as you can look back over the sessions and see what progress you are making.

Surprising Outcomes

Sometimes people achieve exactly what they want to through coaching. Some work out what needs to happen for them to achieve their goals, and continue along their journey feeling revitalised and motivated.

Some may discover, through exploring their goal in new and insightful ways, that their goal isn't what they want after all. A totally new direction emerges and the old goal is no longer relevant. This type of change can lead to dramatic transformations in one's life.

For some people, the goal for coaching is simply to find out what they want, and the clarification of a goal becomes the purpose of coaching. Again, if the insight and clarity is gained this can make a huge impact on someone's life.

Benefits from coaching

A good coach will never tell you what to do, or lead you down a certain direction. Coaches help you to access what is already there inside your own mind, but possibly shadowed or hidden by mental chatter and opinions of others. A coach gives you the time and space to think for yourself, and focuses your attention on what really matters, through insightful questions and exercises.

Working with a coach provides the impetus for taking action and making changes in your life.

How will you know coaching has worked?

For most people, the answer is so resoundingly positive that the question becomes immaterial. They know they have changed for the better, they can feel it and see it, others notice and comment on it.

For others it is more subtle. For this reason it is really useful to gauge where you are in relation to your goal (s) at the beginning of the coaching process. This is your subjective measure, but your opinion is the one that counts here! By assessing yourself on a scale from 1 – 10 at the beginning of your coaching relationship, and again at the end, you can see what improvements have been made. Some coaches may use 360 degree feedback forms for others around you to record the changes they notice. Your coach may also notice changes in you that you haven't been aware of consciously and share those with you. For some people, they find it easier to notice changes in others around them, which have come about as a result in their changed attitude and / or behaviour.

An ongoing cycle

Unlike going to a doctor, who is there to 'fix' you, then leave you alone until you are sick again, coaching is for healthy, happy people who want more of something in their lives. Wherever you are right now, you could benefit from coaching. When one coaching goal is achieved, a new one will emerge. Coaching could be an ongoing process of improvement for the rest of your life!