

What Does a Personal Coach Do and Why is it Important?

What exactly does a personal business coach do?

A coach works with you privately to provide objective, professional direction to increase your performance by helping you enhance what you have and acquire what you need. Frequently, a coaching session is prompted by a career turning point that requires specialized advice. A turning point can be a new promotion; being passed over for a promotion; a move into a new job or industry; a change in reporting, job requirements, or responsibilities; or perhaps a new boss.

Why is there a need today more than ever?

To survive and thrive in today's competitive environment, it's not just what you know. Of course, you need to be extremely competent, but you also must stand out from the crowd in the "soft" side of business—be memorable, impressive, credible, genuine, trusted, and liked. As one of my clients once said, "My role in the company is very visible but they fail to see me." That's a perfect example of why coaching is needed today more than ever.

Why is personal coaching such a hot subject in corporate circles and such a growing business?

Career wise, ambitious people want to avail themselves of anything that will help them grow and improve. Some choose face-lifts. Some choose "style" lifts. A coach works on the latter. Good managers want to help their people do better. Typically more objective than the individual employee, the boss can point out developmental needs. That's what the proliferation of performance appraisals is all about. Once needs are pointed out, some companies choose to follow up by providing an expert who can help the employee acquire the necessary traits. Most commonly this occurs when an individual is promoted from a "doer" job to a "manager/leader" job.

Companies will promote someone before they give them a lick of training about how to stay out of trouble. There is an automatic expectation that you know what to do. Here's a fact: People often don't know what to do, and they sure aren't going to admit it to their boss!

Coaching is a growing business because companies have experienced the success of sending an employee to a good teacher to fix a specialized area. It's a lot cheaper for the company to "help fix" a current employee than to fire the person, risking lawsuit, finding an interim replacement, recruiting the new person (generally at a cost of 33 % of their salary.), and then going through the orientation period, which is typically a less productive time. The bottom line is that coaching saves the company money.

When in a person's career is coaching needed?

The best time to get maximum receptivity to coaching advice is after some setback or a leapfrog event. The setback could be something like missing out on a promotion, losing an account, or suffering a decline of confidence due to something on the job. The leapfrog event could be receiving a promotion, gaining a new (significant) account, or wanting to improve confidence

and competence — to leapfrog ahead of the competition. It could be as simple as turning 40, or 50, a divorce, a death in the family, any eye-opening event that causes you to reevaluate, reflect, and decide to recharge your career.

Another particularly good time is any time you want to cease relying on your sheer brilliance and start availing yourself of all the other ways you can influence upwards, persuade and affect colleagues, sell your ideas, put your mark on a project, stand out from the crowd, and fit in with the powers that be—all that intangible stuff!

Who makes a good coach?

A good coach is someone qualified, objective, and skilled at motivating behavioral change. It's a person who can establish rapport with a wide range of people, ask the right questions, assess problem behaviors, and keep track of effective and not-so-effective behaviors. It's important that the individual suspend judgment and be a helpful colleague, not a competitor.

Another important coaching skill is an understanding of how to criticize constructively, be sensitive when pointing out problems, provide positive encouragement, and care for the self-esteem of the "coachee." The end result of good coaching is improved business performance for the individual and saving a valuable resource for the company.

What happens in a coaching session?

You start by reviewing your personal and professional background, how you got to where you are, where are in your career, why you want coaching, what you hope to gain from the session, and where you want to go in your life. You complete self-assessment materials. A 360° evaluation is helpful in establishing a baseline to work from regarding specific behaviors or skills. Several hours of discussion provide a professional assessment from the coach, and specific feedback is provided to meet the targets agreed upon. Advice may revolve around anything from appearance to decision-making ability to conflict management. It will almost certainly include attitude management, physical behavior, and interpersonal communication. In **InnerActive Personal Development** these are referred to a Mental Energy, Physical Energy and Emotional Energy. The coach and the person being coached agree on an agenda and timetable. An effective coach not only gives good advice but offers that advice in a manner recipients can internalize and make their own, so they can still feel true to themselves. It's important to feel you can still be yourself, or you'll never be comfortable with the new, improved version. An initial session wraps up with a "trigger list" of actions and activities to implement the next day, week and month(s). That session is followed up with a debriefing for the coachee's manager, along with a written action plan from the client. That plan makes sure the coach and the person being coached are always speaking the same language. During regularly scheduled sessions, the client and coach talk to update each other, re-strategize, and report on progress. When appropriate, a subsequent session repeats the process and prepares the client for the new levels of challenges and opportunities.

Challenges and Opportunities are individualized, however, several managers and fast trackers have the following situations to be dealt with in their improvement process:

- Improve my personal and professional presence. Becoming aware of physical bearing, posture, and behavior. Do what it takes mentally, physically and emotionally to communicate self-confidence, not self-consciousness.
- Deal effectively with difficult people. Control attitudes and perspective on things. Don't let others control your perspective. Manage your attitudes while avoiding laziness and forgetfulness.

- Work with people who aren't that smart. Become more generous toward others' actions; be less judgmental. Think, "If I were in their shoes, would I act the exact same way?"
- Handle business social gatherings well. Take charge and initiate conversations with strangers before I'm invited to, before the ice is broken, or before I feel comfortable. Just do it, forget any discomfort, and focus on learning what you can at a gathering and making others feel comfortable.
- Be more personable versus just seeking results at any cost. Ask others about themselves, their interests, successes, setbacks, dreams. Listen well and learn from their experiences. Share your own as well so affinity and rapport can be developed. Look for common ground to build relationships.
- Stay "on" even when you don't feel it. Stop frowning when listening to others (it makes you appear suspicious or at least scared). Maintain an affable expression even when you don't feel it.
- Communicate effectively but interestingly. Insert good humor into serious conversations to improve communication, develop rapport, reduce others' tension, and relax your own stressful feelings. Tell useful stories, anecdotes, and illustrations to make sure your communication is clear and interesting.
- Lead; don't just manage or boss people. Do all you can to maintain the self-esteem of people around you. Ask opinions of others so they feel valued and needed.

How will you benefit from coaching?

One of the best ways to answer this question is to share the remarks of people who have actually experienced a coaching situation.

•"The guidance on delivering a speech, organizing my thoughts, relating to the audience, and handling questions helped improve how I present myself and most important strengthened my self-confidence. As a result, I obtained the promotion I was seeking and am being considered for a new assignment."

"I have a new faith in 'Guardian Angels'. I feel like I have one watching over my personal improvement efforts as I try to manage my relationships with people up, down, and alongside me, rather than letting them just happen"

"Coaching saved my professional life by making me aware of the power I have to influence people if I'll just slow down, think things through, and act accordingly"

"I walked out of the session and closed a major contract based on the strategy we laid out for presenting my position, supporting it with good stories, asking questions to learn about objections, and suggesting alternatives that met their goals and mine"

"I wish I had known this stuff 10 years ago—about walking into a room and making an immediate impact from the handshake on. I thought if I produced results, that was all that was necessary. Now I've learned that at the CEO level, style is instrumental in achieving those results"

The key benefit for everyone being coached has been an increased awareness, confidence, and the ability to act in a more effective manner with people up and down the ladder, inside and outside the organization. When your personal performance is raised, your organizational performance is enhanced and you create greater job security.

How do companies benefit?

They save a valuable resource because employees don't quit for lack of support and then move to another company that cares more about them.

They save money because they don't have to pay to recruit a replacement for someone who quit, or replace a person they had to fire because she or he lacked the necessary "soft" side of business leadership.

They improve morale because good people feel valued when the company "invests" in them.

They become more competitive and unique because they have a motivated, happy, skilled team who can handle most any situation they are faced with in an effective manner, both in substance and style.

Can individuals coach themselves?

Yes. People do it all the time. However, it is easier and more rewarding if you eliminate the guessing, trial and error, and misdirection and substitute proven techniques and approaches. If speed and effectiveness are critical, then consider finding a coach who can accelerate your personal improvement process.

Whether you are professionally coached or self coached, the key is that results occur only if you take the necessary action. Accountability for your own actions is very important – to you and your coach. If you don't want to change or improve, then nothing will move you to your goals.

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