

A Coaching Overview

What is personal coaching?

Coaching is a form of learning, where a person (a coach) supports someone else (a coachee) to create learning and self-development in a way that benefits them. Coaching is normally a conversation, or series of conversations, one person has with another. The coach intends to produce a conversation that will benefit the other person, the coachee, in a way that relates to the coachee's learning and progress.

Why do people have coaching?

People enlist the services of a coach because they want to improve their situation and achieve goals. They want to learn new ways of thinking and approaching situations, in order to get better results. A skilled coach uses a combination of observation, questioning, listening and feedback to create a conversation that is rich in insight and learning. For the coachee, they will experience a focus and attention that enable them to develop a greater awareness and appreciation of their own circumstances. In addition they will also create new ways to resolve issues, produce better results and generally achieve their goals more easily.

Common benefits people experience from coaching include:

- Improved sense of direction and focus
- Increased knowledge of self/self-awareness
- Improved ability to relate to and influence others
- Increased motivation
- Improved personal effectiveness, e.g. focused effort
- Increased resourcefulness/resilience, e.g. ability to handle change

What coaching is not?

Coaching is none of the following

- Structured training or teaching, e.g. classroom learning – coaching follows a more flexible format, according to the coachee's objective and both the coach and the coachee influence the direction and content of sessions.
- Therapy, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy – coaching is not therapy and focuses on the present and future rather than the past. In therapy the focus is usually on getting away from pain or discomfort rather than moving towards desired goals.

- A way of someone else solving your problems for you. Coaching is based on the principle that an individual is ultimately responsible for their lives and the results they are getting. If we acknowledge that we are responsible for something, it follows that we have power and influence over it. What a coach will not do is instruct you to go and do something specific, or go and do it for you. If they did, the coach would be taking responsibility – and so power – away from you.

What you can expect from your coach

The role of coach provides a kind of support distinct from any other. Your coach will focus solely on your situations with the kind of attention and commitment that you rarely experience elsewhere.

Your coach will listen to you, with a genuine curiosity to understand who you are, what you think and generally how you experience the world. Your coach will reflect back to you, with the kind of objective assessment that creates real clarity. During conversations, your coach will encourage you to rise to challenges, overcome obstacles and get into action.

A coaching relationship is like no other, simply because of its combination of objective detachment and commitment to the goals of the individual. Because the relationship is based on trust and openness, the contents of your discussions will be confidential. Where a third party has requested the coaching for you, the coach will agree with you the best way to keep them involved or updated.

What your coach will expect from you

In return, your coach will encourage you to stay committed to the coaching process. That means showing up for sessions, taking your own notes where appropriate, and keeping any agreements you make during sessions.

Your coach also needs you to be open to the potential of coaching. That means contributing to conversations honestly and openly. For example, if something isn't working, your coach needs to know. If you have concerns or problems, voice them. If you know why a problem is occurring, say so. The strength and power of coaching relates strongly to the level of openness and trust between you and your coach.

(With acknowledgement to Julie Starr, The Coaching Manual)