

The Secrets of Finding the Right Coach

Choosing to work with a coach (whether personal, executive, business, leadership or corporate) is like choosing any other professional who learns something about you or your business. Most of us have a personal doctor, an accountant, a solicitor, financial adviser, and perhaps several others. Working with your own personal coach is no different. However, making sure you choose the right coach for you contains some risk.

Coaching (off the sporting field) is relatively new in most countries and there are not many ground-rules to guide you.

This report has been created to help you reduce that risk.

Choosing your coach is a very important decision and one that should be made carefully. Your coach will have access to some of your private thoughts and aspirations, including some information that you may never have told anybody else.

In short, you will want to be able to trust your coach and that is why it is important to choose wisely.

Here is a list of headings that will be discussed:

- Who are coaches and what can I expect from them?
- Are all coaches the same?
- How are coaches educated?
- Is my coach a member of a professional body?
- Does my coach keep up to date and invest in relevant professional development?
- What values does my potential coach live by?

There is also a step-by-step guide to help you choose a coach and to be able to maintain a constructive and positive professional relationship.

Step One: Deciding what your goals are

Step Two: Looking for your coach

Step Three: Interviewing potential coaches

Step Four: Checking references

Step Five: Knowing who's in charge

Step Six: Knowing what to expect

Who are coaches and what can I expect from them?

A successful sports person would not dream of achieving without having their own coach. Even the world's most elite athletes depend on their coach to create that small distinction that gives them that competitive edge. Coaching off the sporting field has been around now for several decades, mostly within large organisations and some businesses.

Within the next five years, it will become quite common for people to have their own personal coach in the same way as they have a trusted doctor as part of their extended team.

The role of today's personal coach is to work alongside of you so that you are able to achieve the goals that you set for yourself and develop a life in which you feel happiest and most fulfilled.

Many reading this report will have had experience with, or perhaps you yourself are working as, a consultant or a mentor. A coach is different. A consultant will undertake to analyse your situation and provide you with some solutions to implement. A mentor is usually somebody who has been there and done that, and who will teach you the ropes, and they usually know something of the technical or professional aspects of what it is you wish to learn more about.

A coach, on the other hand, will help you to find your own solutions and would not necessarily have done the work or lived the life that you have. A great coach however will know how to bring out your best. For example, Michael Jordan is perhaps the world's best basketball player - yet his coach is able to get him to excel without having to have the same level of skill in playing basketball.

Are all coaches the same?

There are two main distinctions to be kept in mind here.

The first is that not all coaches have been formally certified as competent by their peers and therefore are not trained in the art and skills of coaching someone like you. It is unfortunate but true,

that as coaching is an emerging trend there are a number of untrained people setting themselves up as coaches.

The other point to consider is whether the coach you are considering is a proper match for you and has your best interests at heart.

How are coaches educated?

There are three answers to this:

1. Their own life education and experiences, both personal and professional, will add to the quality of the coach.
2. Their own business and professional background and education, for instance some coaches have a thorough understanding of small business, others have a successful consulting or psychology background and may have specialised in certain professions before taking up coaching.
3. They would have enrolled in and completed a Coach Training Program in an internationally recognised institute of some kind.

It is important before deciding to work with a coach that not only is there a match between you as individuals, and that you feel that you can trust this person and work successfully with them, but that they have the credentials and experience that is going to be of benefit to you in your particular circumstances.

Is my coach a member of a professional body?

Check before you sign up that your coach is a member of the International Coaching Federation (ICF), which is the international body, which will accredit the profession and ensures that its standards and protocols are upheld.

- Is your coach an active member of a professional body?
- Do they contribute to the coaching community and if so, in what way?
- Do they have a solid reputation with their peers? Can this be substantiated?
- What is their professional standing in the coaching community at large?

Answers to these sorts of questions will let you know whether you are getting the best of the best.

Does my coach have to keep up to date?

Any coach who wishes to have a positive impact in their clients' lives must be committed to life-long learning. Not only should they be active readers, but also people who have access to resources, information, and knowledge that is going to be of benefit for you. So how well connected are they? What do they know that can assist you?

All of the coaches in The Human Dimension team are part of a worldwide coaching community through www.coachuo.com.au where there is a whole network of coaches equally committed to staying up to date in order to provide the best possible outcome for each of their clients.

Step One: Deciding what your goals are

The first question to answer for yourself is: why do I want to work with a coach anyway?

Here are some reasons why people work with a coach:

(a) At a personal level:

- To build a better life
- To get clearer about what really matters
- To experience more joy, happiness and a greater sense of fulfilment
- To complete a project
- To achieve a number of important goals
- To identify and overcome points in your life where you are getting stuck
- To achieve more on your business
- To be more successful at your work
- To improve your effectiveness in a whole lot of life areas
- To have somebody as a sounding board who will provide you with unbiased and constructive feedback
- To deal with some current challenge in a more constructive manner

(b) At a corporate level:

- To shape, re-design or develop a different culture

- To improve communication amongst all levels
- To improve performance and efficiency
- To refocus on vision, mission, purpose
- To get alignment between goals, strategies and behaviours
- To have an independent and external sounding board
- To train and assist managers in becoming coaches
- To transform managers into leaders
- To have leaders who inspire others to be their best

Now that you know what coaches can do for you, which of the points in the above lists most appeal to you?

Now that you have decided that it would be worthwhile to talk to a few potential coaches, here's what you need to do...

Step Two: Where to look for your coach

Both the International Coaching Federation <http://www.coachfederation.org> or the Australian region link <http://www.icfaustralasia.com> together with Australia's largest coach-training organisation CoachU (www.coachuoze.com.au) have online referral sites where you can read profiles of personal, business and corporate coaches. Then you are able to either interview by phone or by email or, if they are in your city, meet for coffee and find out more about whether they would be a suitable coach for you.

I suggest that once you have worked out what is important to you in your potential coach relationship, you would go prepared with some questions so that the partnership that you develop with your new coach is one that works to your benefit.

Remember that in working with a coach you will have somebody that you might want to trust with your most intimate secrets. This means that you will need to make sure that there is a rapport and that you believe that ultimately you would enjoy and welcome a professional relationship with this person. Just as there are many different types of doctors, accountants or solicitors, so there are many different individuals and companies who are beginning to offer coaching services.

Because it is your life, and either you or your company is paying for the investment of coaching, you will want to make sure that you get the best that suits your particular needs and aspirations at the time.

Step Three: Interviewing potential coaches

Here are some suggested questions for you to ask your potential coach:

- Who have you worked with in the past? And why did those people/organisations engage you?
- What are the benefits that you think you bring to your clients?
- Can you give me the names of three other people/organisations with whom you have worked as a coach?
- Under what circumstances/situations do you do your best work?
- Are there any clients/organisations with whom you would not work?
- What approach/style would you say best describes your coaching approach?
- What methods, processes and resources do you use in your coaching?
- What do you think we would work on together in the first ninety days?
- What credentials/experience do you have that you think would benefit me/my organisation?

Step Four: Checking references

Usually when you ask for information, check a website, or read through a coach's brochure, you will often find they will list other organisations/people they have worked with in the past. You will often find that testimonials will speak in glowing terms of the benefits that the client has experienced, however it might be more helpful to you to take another approach.

Instead of just taking the testimonials at face-value, why not instead present one or two situations/problems/concerns/goals to the potential coach and ask them to describe how they would respond to that situation and what examples can they draw on to show you how they have dealt with a similar situation with someone else.

Taking this approach will give you a better appreciation if this particular coach is likely to be of help to you in your particular situation.

Step Five: Knowing who's in charge

A consultant might be engaged to provide you with answers, however in working with a coach, they are far more likely to ask you questions which help *you* uncover what is truly important in your life. Even though a great coach who has been trained and will often have many other experiences similar to yours to draw on, no two situations are exactly the same. You do not want to be presented with a 'copy-cat' situation that worked for someone else.

The coach's experience will enable them to tailor-make a response which answers your particular needs. With a coach, *you* are the expert when it comes to *your* life, and your coach is on the side encouraging, challenging, and supporting you at every stage.

It ought to be clear to you by now that you are in charge within the coaching relationship and that you are not relying on an outside expert to fix things up. On the contrary, a great coach will not see you as somebody who needs repair or an organisation that needs to be fixed, but rather will acknowledge that you have done your very best and that you are to be well-regarded no matter what your current circumstances.

An effective coach will always work to your strengths and be a source of encouragement, never criticising, demeaning or putting you down. They will always want the best for you.

Step Six: What to expect

Coaching can be provided either face-to-face or over the telephone, and it usual to enter into a monthly program with some kind of timeframe as to the initial length of engagement.

In the future it will be common for individuals and organisations to form lifelong partnerships with those coaches who get results.

A coaching relationship will involve regular contact with your coach at prearranged times where you discuss and work around an agreed program. A trained coach will have access to a whole variety of programs, instruments and resources, which are to assist you or an organisation to develop.

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