

What is Coaching?



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Coaching is a form of development, where a Coach supports you (a coachee) to create learning, self-development and improved performance in a way that benefits you.

From early forms of transportation, i.e. stage coach, or rail coach, the word “coaching” literally means to transport someone from one place to another. One thing that all forms of coaching have in common is that people are using it to help them move forward in a certain direction.

One simple example is probably that of a sports coach. Here, the coach supports the individual to improve their performance and get better results; depending on what they want to achieve. For a golfer, the goal might be winning a major tournament, or simply improving their grip. The role of the coach is to apply specific principles of success, in a way that creates experiential learning and improvement for the golfer.

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.

For example, coaching might consist of two people talking in a room about things the coachee wants to change. This is sometimes called “off-line” coaching. It might also be one person observing another person doing something, e.g. chairing a meeting, then discussing that afterwards. This can be called “on-line” coaching.

Why do people have coaching?

People enlist the services of a coach because they want to improve their situations and achieve goals. They want to learn new ways of thinking and approaching situations, in order to get better results. Common goals might be being more effective and organised at work, gaining confidence in certain situations, or simply relating to other people more effectively.

A skilled coach uses a combination of observation, questioning, listening and feedback to create a conversation 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 goals more easily.

Common benefits people experience from coaching include:

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

What coaching is not

Coaching is not any of the following:

- **Structured training, e.g. classroom learning**

Structured training relates to a fixed agenda of learning, and a prepared approach to making that learning happen. For example, if you were being trained in a classroom to use a computer, the trainer would use a structured approach to making sure you learn a certain amount of information, within a certain time frame.

Coaching follows a more flexible format, according to the coachee's objectives. Both the coachee and the coach influence the direction and content of sessions. Coaching also places real responsibility for learning on the individual and encourages learning to continue after the session.

- **Therapy, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy**

Whilst coaching is not therapy, and should not be viewed as therapy, it does provide a viable alternative to people who may have previously considered some form of counselling to resolve a situation. For example, coaching promotes a greater self-awareness, and full appreciation of our situations and circumstances. Sometimes, change can be promoted by a simple change in perspectives. Barriers of self-belief such as "I cannot" or "I do not" can be challenged in order to encourage fresh approaches and ideas.

- **A way of someone else solving your problems for you**

Coaching is based in 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. For example, if you are not getting the results at work that you want, a coach may encourage you to:

- Understand the situation more clearly
- Develop new ideas or approaches for such situations
- Take constructive action that gets you the results you want

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, we 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.

In addition, your coach needs you to be open to the potential of coaching. That means contributing to conversations honestly and openly. For example, if something is not 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 the coach and the coachee.

(Source: The Coaching Manual by Julie Starr)