

Coaching: frequently asked questions

The use of a life-skills, business or executive coach to enhance your work performance or life experience is growing in popularity. However, coaches are not all created equal and not all coaching approaches are effective. We asked Executive Coach Deborah Marr to answer some of the typical questions about coaching and to provide some guidelines for selecting someone to work with you or your team.

1. What is the difference between life skills coaching, business coaching and executive coaching?

All coaching involves development of your skills, your performance and effectiveness in your present job, your future career and your work or personal agenda.

- Life-skills coaching preceded business and executive coaching and aims to clarify values and visions, set goals and identify actions leading to a more satisfying, successful and fulfilling life.
- Business coaching helps business owners, managers and organisations to develop, promote and grow their business, their staff and themselves.
- Executive coaching has its roots in the leadership development programs of the 1980s. Executive coaches work in large organisations to build a top performing team or help individuals become effective team players. It focuses on helping leaders develop their interpersonal and communication skills, improve business outcomes and enhance personal satisfaction and career opportunities.

2. How is coaching different from mentoring or therapy?

Coaching — like therapy — has its roots in psychology. However, therapists work with clients with diagnosable psychological conditions whereas coaches work with normal (non-clinical) adult populations. In addition, therapy tends to focus on the resolution of old pains and issues while coaching helps to find solutions, set goals, and forward action.

Mentoring — unlike coaching — usually focuses on career advancement. Mentors typically have experience at senior management level with a broad knowledge of organisational structure, policies, power and culture. Mentors give

advice about strategies and policies whereas coaching is about eliciting answers from the individual.

3. Why is coaching becoming so popular?

The increasing popularity of coaching is a response to the intensity and speed of change in our society. Change reduces our sense of security and can affect our motivation and commitment to projects and goals. Coaches help you find the advantages of change at work and in your personal lives. They are positive change agents who motivate you to find new hope and purpose and to take the steps necessary for sustaining a cautious optimism. They help you invent and design a new future and to see change as an asset for getting the job done rather than a reason to be afraid.

4. How soon can I expect a result?

In many cases, a twelve-week coaching program is regarded as a good start for making sustained behavioural change. However, the time it takes to get the results varies from individual to individual. Some issues can be resolved simply and speedily but in other cases, it can take at least six weeks to develop new patterns of behaviour. Look for a coach who is prepared to meet with you and define the outcomes you want and then make a formal proposal about the kind and length of program required and the results you can expect.

5. How do I know that coaching is working?

Most coaching clients report an improved sense of wellbeing and satisfaction. Because goal setting is an integral part of coaching you can often measure your progress by achieving small, measurable steps towards your goals. Other indications of success are improved performance appraisals, better feedback and positive comments on your results and progress from colleagues and friends.

6. Who receives coaching ?

Life-skills coaching is aimed at normal healthy adults who want to make changes in their personal and professional lives. As the name implies, business coaching is directed at business owners who want to develop, promote and grow their business and their managers and staff. In contrast, directors, senior executives, managers and emerging

leaders in the private and public sectors are among those who benefit from the services of an executive coach. If you have recently joined an organisation, operate in a climate of change, have just been promoted or want a promotion, an executive coach can make all the difference.

7. What credentials should I look for in a coach?

There are no formal credentials required to operate as a business, life-skills or executive coach in Australia. However, it is wise to look for a coach whose understanding of the coaching process goes beyond a personal or proprietary system and explicitly links to established theory and practice in the following areas:

- Behavioural Science which explains how we think, feel and act the way we do
- Adult Education Principles underpinning how adults learn
- Economics and Business or how business runs and how economic systems function.

In addition, look for coaches who are able to talk fluently about the theory and evidence that underpin their approach. Also, look for a commitment to a written code of ethics covering the coaching relationship and a formal coaching agreement.

The Coaching Psychology Unit at Sydney University provides degree level programs in coaching covering the Behavioural Science of Coaching, the Applied "Art" of Coaching and Ethical and Professional Practice. These courses are intended to align with the guidelines established by the International Coach Federation and to meet the requirements for ICF coach accreditation via the portfolio track. For further information visit www.psych.usyd.edu.au

8. What does coaching involve ?

Coaching involves a collaborative, egalitarian relationship between you and your coach. It focuses on helping you construct solutions rather than analyse your problems. You and your coach collaborate in goal setting and your coach facilitates the learning you need to achieve your goals.

9. How do I learn more about coaching?

There are several good books about how coaching works. They include the following:

- Grant, A., & Greene, J., (2001). *Coach Yourself: Make real change in your life*. London: Momentum Press.
- O'Neill, M., (2000) *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Peltier, B., (2001) *The Psychology of Executive Coaching: Theory and Application*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Good websites include www.psych.usyd.edu.au (especially "useful links") and www.coachfederation.org.

You can also contact Deborah Marr for an obligation free meeting to discuss your coaching needs and answer further questions.

10. About Executive Coach-Deborah Marr

Executive Coach, Deborah Marr provides a variety of executive coaching programs to a wide range of emerging leaders in organisations around Sydney. Drawing on 30 years of diverse business experience, including five years as a non-executive director, Deborah delivers sustained behavioural change and improved organisational outcomes using a collaborative, systematic, solution-focused and results-oriented approach to coaching. Her distinctive personal style combines compassion and inspiration with straight talk and a desire to help you develop an appropriate and successful business image.

Her studies for her Master's in Human Resources Management and Coaching at Sydney University build on her previous academic and work experience in the area of equal opportunity and workforce diversity. Together with her expertise in organisational development and culture change and the design and implementation of leadership programs, they strengthen her capacity to help talented managers grow into effective, confident and bold leaders.

For more information you can reach Deborah Marr, Executive Coach – Building Bold Leaders at 0408 254 360 or deborahmarr@bigpond.com.