

# Section I

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## Coaching as a Service

This section of the book is designed to help you more fully understand what coaching is and how you can become a more savvy consumer of coaching services. The chapters in this section equip you with fundamental, practical knowledge: what constitutes coaching, when it is appropriate to use it, how to select a coach, and what to expect in a coaching contract. You will be able to gain a deeper understanding of how to go about incorporating coaching as another tool to help people improve their job performance. This section enables you to know what critical questions to ask of coaching professionals so that you can serve the needs of your organization.

*Chapter 1. What Is Coaching?* Here we provide a brief history of coaching and some of the rationale for its recent popularity in organizations as an effective learning methodology to stimulate executive development. Driving forces behind organizational change are listed. Definitions of different forms of professional helping are provided to draw clear distinctions between related terms.

*Chapter 2. When Is It Appropriate to Use Coaching?* In this chapter, we cover topics such as the types of situations in which coaching could provide the most value and the kinds of circumstances that lend themselves more to using coaching than using other forms of developmental learning methods. We explain what the coach

and the coaching process contribute to the learning of “soft skills,” such as interpersonal skills, communication, delegation, and adjusting to the fast pace of change. In this chapter you will begin to understand more about what actually happens in the coaching relationship and why coaching can be such an effective process. Conversely, it is also important to know when not to use a coach and when coaching will not have much of an impact.

*Chapter 3. How Do You Select a Coach?* Here we provide some guidelines on finding a coach and things to look for in selecting the right coach. This chapter will help you to hire the professional who is most appropriate to the task. You will gain an understanding of the factors to think through when selecting a coach, such as training, experience, and skills and competencies. Since the chemistry between client and coach is so important to a successful outcome, this chapter provides some ideas on how to work with the client in selecting the coach. Finally, this chapter also provides some insight into things to avoid in a coach to enable you to prevent potential problems down the road.

*Chapter 4. What Are the Steps in the Coaching Process?* In this chapter, we delineate the logical progression of the steps in the coaching process, such as contracting with the coach, setting goals, assessing results, action planning, and evaluation. In nearly all circumstances, a coaching process will begin with a general understanding among the client, the HR professional, the boss, and the coach about what is going to happen in the coaching engagement. You will learn about the importance of having a good structure for the coaching assignment and what elements should be in a good contract. Since one of the most important steps is having a clear understanding of the client’s issues, what is to be accomplished by the coaching is a critical part of the initial goal setting. Brief descriptions of different forms of assessment data and their value, such as interviews, multi-rater feedback, surveys, and direct observations, shed light on how and why

objective information can be very powerful. Various forms of action planning, or planning for development, are explained so that you can see what the client may need to do in order to learn new behaviors. If you know what questions to ask to evaluate whether the coaching process was successful or not, it can help you to determine whether the client remained on track and whether or not goals were achieved. This chapter poses some questions for you to consider to enable you to evaluate the overall outcome of the coaching process.



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# What Is Coaching?

This first chapter addresses the most elemental question of all: What is coaching? Many people have different definitions, so it's worth taking a closer look. Topics covered are

- A short history
- Driving forces behind organizational change
- Definitions of coaching
- Definitions of related terms

## A Short History

Coaching is a term traditionally associated with athletics. Everyone in the sports field expects to receive a lot of coaching. There is no belief that good athletes come by their skills in some entirely “natural” way. That’s why the people who run the teams are called “Coach” as their official title.

But that wasn’t always the case. Perhaps you recall the movie *Chariots of Fire*, about a British Olympic team in the early 20th century. At that time the idea of hiring a professional coach to improve a track runner’s performance was considered at least newsworthy if not scandalous. Today everyone in athletics uses a coach, and the coaches are expected to be competent professionals.

Coaching to improve organizational performance and to help bring out an executive's potential have also gone through a history of increased acceptance. There is no clear starting point for the use of coaching for executives, but according to some views coaching has been going on for fifty years or so under the labels of consulting or counseling. Most people agree, however, that it wasn't a common practice until the late 1980s or early 1990s; since that time it has generally been known as coaching.

In the earlier years coaching often was triggered when it became apparent that an executive was missing a specific skill, for example, not being able to speak effectively on television or to large groups, or in preparation for an overseas assignment. Often the reason to bring in a coach had to do with interpersonal issues, or possibly there were concerns of a "personal" nature having to do with health, career, or family matters. These situations typically had an aura of secrecy about them because of a desire not to let anyone know that a coach was being used.

## **Driving Forces Behind Organizational Change**

Since the mid-1990s the world of work has changed drastically. The same forces that are changing our lives in organizations are driving the greater use of coaching (see Table 1.1). The demands placed on organizational leadership in the new business environment have expanded greatly.

Corporations have grown lean and have lost pools of talent in the downsizing efforts. Those left in charge often did not have the years of experience needed to inform their decision making. The pace of change in organizations had accelerated and a premium was put on speed. This meant there was precious little time for consensus building or intelligence gathering, and so the risk of errors by a leader or leadership team increased. Coaching emerged as the preferred "just in time" learning to help leverage the areas that would have the greatest impact on results.

Table 1.1 Driving Forces Behind Organizational Change and the Use of Coaching

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- Globalization of business, extending to vendors, resources, markets, and competition
  - Flatter, leaner, more rapidly changing organizations, with the inevitable result that bosses have a harder time developing or even knowing their direct reports
  - More teamwork and greater emphasis on lateral rather than vertical relationships
  - Greater integration of the world economy and its attendant knowledge requirements
  - Reliance on technology and a focus on e-business, plus the task of keeping up with the speed of obsolescence in the IT industry
  - A fiercely competitive marketplace, with its premium on speed, savvy, and flexibility
  - Increasing pressure to produce short-term financial results
  - The need to optimize the talents of domestic and international multi-cultural workforces
  - Expanded personal work demands placed on leaders related to global relationships and travel, business complexity, and faster organizational change
  - The proliferation of alliances, acquisitions, partnerships, and joint ventures
  - Shifts in values and priorities associated with younger generations, dual-career marriages, and both positive and not-so-positive changes in the larger worldwide society
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As we write about coaching today, the aura of secrecy has been entirely dispelled. Coaching may still be triggered by a problem, but this is no longer viewed as “an issue.” Executives are expected to be challenged with tasks they’ve never undertaken before or that may be entirely new to the organization. Additionally, many coaching assignments are initiated entirely to help the client grow as an executive, without there being any specific gap in skills or style

identified before the coaching begins. Even when a problem has been encountered, an important goal of the coaching is to stimulate the client’s overall growth and development, not just “fix” the problem.

It is not surprising, then, that greater numbers of larger and mid-sized companies and other organizations are using coaches these days. Coaches are not licensed by the government, and they aren’t listed on a national roster. All kinds of people use the “coach” designation on their business cards. Coaches are also found throughout the economy, in entrepreneurial start-ups, family businesses, health care organizations, government agencies, and just about everywhere else. Coaching is well-established as a management practice throughout Europe and is growing as a service in Asia and Latin America.

### Definitions of Coaching

A number of different definitions of coaching are available. For purposes of this book, we think of coaching as *a one-on-one development process formally contracted between a coach and a management-level client to help achieve goals related to professional development and/or business performance*. Coaching typically focuses on helping the client to become more self-aware through the use of action learning methods.

Some fine points about that definition should be given attention.

- “One-on-one” doesn’t mean others aren’t involved. The boss and HR manager are almost certainly involved. The client’s peers and subordinates also may be. But this isn’t team development, or mediation, or any other form of consulting that has a multiple-person client. Here it is clear that one person is the primary client.

- “Formally contracted” means this is very intentional and planned. There’s nothing casual about a coaching relationship. It is a business deal and usually entails a letter or memo clarifying the terms of the deal.
- “Management-level” can mean anything from recently hired professionals up to the CEO. The client doesn’t have to have a “manager” or “director” title, but should be a present or future participant in the leadership and managerial processes of the organization. This book isn’t intended for situations focused primarily on craft, hourly wage, or administrative support employees.
- Some “goals” are related to short-term business results, while other legitimate coaching goals are focused on bringing out the future potential of the client. It’s usually a mix of these issues. Goals that are too highly personal, however, are more properly addressed by a different kind of professional helper. Goals that are entirely business and not at all personal, such as changing a product’s brand image, are outside the range on the other end.
- “Action learning.” Coaching presses the client to do the learning. This happens by helping clients find and use good data about themselves and others and to develop a wider range of self-management and leadership skills. The coach doesn’t show up with correct answers. The client does the hard work and is left with skills that should serve a lifetime.

One way to categorize coaching situations is along these lines:

- *Skill development*—typically an interpersonal or self-management skill

- *Performance*—problematic behaviors, new challenges
- *Development*—competencies needed for the future

The coaching we’re talking about applies in all three of these kinds of situations. Sometimes the purposes overlap, and sometimes the goals extend in additional directions, but these are typical settings.

## Definitions of Related Terms

Since terms can be overlapping and confusing. Let’s take a look at some relevant distinctions.

### Coaching vs. Consulting

When helping clients address goals related to business performance, the coach can sometimes function, in part, as a business consultant. Sometimes the distinction between coaching and consulting may appear to be blurred. That is because the topics of discussion in coaching sessions are framed within the context of organizational results that must be achieved. To help a client be successful, the coach must take into account both the client’s strategic business challenges and his or her unique pattern of strengths and developmental needs. Successful coaching outcomes occur when clients develop the skills and abilities that enable them to attain specific goals. Consulting is more problem-focused and has a larger definition of the client—one consults to systems and/or organizations.

### Other Types of Coaching, Mentoring, and Therapy

*Life coaching* is a form of professional helping that focuses entirely on the individual. Relevant issues include family, career, health, spirituality, finances, and community involvement, as well as

performance at work. We would agree that a person who has his or her life in good order is likely to be a better contributor at work. However, the nature of the contract here is different (for example, wider scope, less tilted toward organizational outcomes), and the life coach needs a different set of skills.

*Supervisory coaching* occurs between the client and the boss, as was mentioned earlier. A boss cannot do what an independent coach does. The boss has much greater accountability for achieving results and for clarifying realistic expectations and standards. The boss has authority to take or recommend disciplinary actions, rewards, and other organizational actions. Sure, the boss can be supportive and helpful—but the boss is ultimately still boss. Coaching also calls for a high degree of confidentiality, which is not possible with bosses.

*Mentoring* has to do with long-term career sponsorship. A mentor normally is a highly placed executive who takes a stewardship interest in the performance and career of a younger professional. In a mentoring relationship, the focus is on career advising and advancement.

*Therapy* is provided as a mental health service by psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, and other therapists, that is, mental health professionals. It is appropriate when there is a painful and perhaps dangerous problem that needs to be corrected. Therapy typically has a greater historical focus than does coaching, which is present/future oriented.

## Summary

To provide a starting point and some perspective, in this chapter we have covered a brief history of coaching and the rationale for its recent widespread popularity. Recent driving forces for organizational change have been highlighted and executive coaching has been defined and explained. To enable readers to understand the available options for coaching, mentoring, and therapy, the

distinctions have been drawn among these different types of assistance and what they have to offer.

Looking ahead to the next chapter, we examine the kinds of circumstances under which coaching is most appropriate. You will begin to understand more about what really happens in the coaching relationship and about situations and settings where coaching may not be the best option.