

Coaching FAQs

From ICF International Coach Federation

What is professional coaching?

ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential, which is particularly important in today's uncertain and complex environment. Coaches honor the client as the expert in his or her life and work and believe every client is creative, resourceful and whole. Standing on this foundation, the coach's responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve
- Encourage client self-discovery
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
- Hold the client responsible and accountable

This process helps clients dramatically improve their outlook on work and life, while improving their leadership skills and unlocking their potential.

How can you determine if coaching is right for you?

To determine whether you or your company could benefit from coaching, start by summarizing what you would expect to accomplish in coaching. When an individual or business has a fairly clear idea of the desired outcome, a coaching partnership can be a useful tool for developing a strategy for how to achieve that outcome with greater ease.

Since coaching is a partnership, ask yourself whether collaboration, other viewpoints, and new perspectives are valued. Also, ask yourself whether you or your business is ready to devote the time and the energy to making real changes. If the answer is yes, then coaching may be a beneficial way to grow and develop.

How is coaching distinct from other service professions?

Professional coaching focuses on setting goals, creating outcomes and managing personal change. Sometimes it's helpful to understand coaching by distinguishing it from other personal or organizational support professions.

- Therapy: Therapy deals with healing pain, dysfunction and conflict within an individual or in relationships. The focus is often on resolving difficulties arising from the past that hamper an individual's emotional functioning in the present, improving overall psychological functioning, and dealing with the present in more emotionally healthy ways. Coaching, on the other hand, supports personal and professional growth based on self-initiated change in pursuit of specific actionable outcomes. These outcomes are linked to personal or professional success. Coaching is future focused. While positive feelings/emotions may be a natural outcome of coaching, the primary focus is on creating actionable strategies for achieving specific goals in one's work or personal life. The emphases in a coaching relationship are on action, accountability, and follow through.
- Consulting: Individuals or organizations retain consultants for their expertise. While consulting approaches vary widely, the assumption is the consultant will diagnose problems and prescribe and, sometimes, implement solutions. With coaching, the assumption is that individuals or teams are capable of generating their own solutions, with the coach supplying supportive, discovery-based approaches and frameworks.
- Mentoring: A mentor is an expert who provides wisdom and guidance based on his or her own experience. Mentoring may include advising, counseling and coaching. The coaching process does not include advising or counseling, and focuses instead on individuals or groups setting and reaching their own objectives.
- Training: Training programs are based on objectives set out by the trainer or instructor. Though objectives are clarified in the coaching process, they are set by the individual or team being coached, with guidance provided by the coach. Training also assumes a linear learning path that coincides with an established curriculum. Coaching is less linear without a set curriculum.
- Athletic Development: Though sports metaphors are often used, professional coaching is different

from sports coaching. The athletic coach is often seen as an expert who guides and directs the behavior of individuals or teams based on his or her greater experience and knowledge. Professional coaches possess these qualities, but their experience and knowledge of the individual or team determines the direction. Additionally, professional coaching, unlike athletic development, does not focus on behaviors that are being executed poorly or incorrectly. Instead, the focus is on identifying opportunity for development based on individual strengths and capabilities.

What are some typical reasons someone might work with a coach?

An individual or team might choose to work with a coach for many reasons, including but not limited to the following:

- Something urgent, compelling or exciting is at stake (a challenge, stretch goal or opportunity)
- A gap exists in knowledge, skills, confidence or resources
- A desire to accelerate results
- A lack of clarity with choices to be made
- Success has started to become problematic
- Work and life are out of balance, creating unwanted consequences
- Core strengths need to be identified, along with how best to leverage them

What has caused the tremendous growth in the coaching industry?

Coaching has grown significantly for many reasons, among them:

- Rapid changes are taking place in the external business environment.
- Downsizing, restructuring, mergers and other organizational changes have radically altered the "traditional employment contract." Companies can no longer achieve results using traditional management approaches.
- With the growing shortage of talented employees in certain industries, companies must commit to investing in individuals' development.
- The disparity between what managers were trained to do and what their jobs now require of them is widening due to increasing demands for competitive results.
- People are wrestling with job insecurity and increased workplace pressures to perform at higher levels than ever before.
- Companies must develop inclusive, collaborative work environments to achieve strategic business goals and to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction.
- Individuals who have experienced the excellent results of coaching are talking to more people about it.
- People today are more open to the idea of being in charge of their own lives. Coaching helps them do just that.

In short, coaching helps individuals and companies focus on what matters most in life and business, and so the industry continues to grow.

How is coaching delivered? What does the process look like?

Coaching typically begins with a personal interview (either face-to-face or by teleconference call) to assess the individual's or business' current opportunities and challenges, define the scope of the relationship, identify priorities for action and establish specific desired outcomes. Subsequent coaching sessions may be conducted in person or over the telephone, with each session lasting a previously established length of time. Between scheduled coaching sessions, the individual may be asked to complete specific actions that support the achievement of one's personally prioritized goals. The coach may provide additional resources in the form of relevant articles, checklists, assessments or models to support the individual's or business' thinking and actions. The duration of the coaching relationship varies depending on needs and preferences.

- Assessments: A variety of assessments are available to support the coaching process, depending upon the needs and circumstances of the individual or business. Assessments provide objective information that can enhance self-awareness, as well as awareness of others and their circumstances; provide a benchmark for creating coaching goals and actionable strategies; and offer

a method for evaluating progress.

- Concepts, models and principles: A variety of concepts, models and principles drawn from the behavioral sciences, management literature, spiritual traditions and/or the arts and humanities may be incorporated into the coaching conversation to increase self-awareness and awareness of others, foster shifts in perspective, promote fresh insights, provide new frameworks for looking at opportunities and challenges, and energize and inspire forward actions.
- Appreciative approach: Coaching incorporates an appreciative approach, grounded in what's right, what's working, what's wanted and what's needed to get there. Using an appreciative approach, the coach models constructive communication skills and methods to enhance personal communication effectiveness. He or she incorporates discovery-based inquiry, proactive (as opposed to reactive) ways of managing personal opportunities and challenges, constructive framing of observations and feedback to elicit the most positive responses from others, and visions of success as contrasted with focusing on problems. The appreciative approach is simple to understand and employ, and its reach can be profound, opening up new possibilities and spurring action.

How long does a coach work with an individual?

The length of a coaching partnership varies depending on the individual's or team's needs and preferences. For certain types of focused coaching, three to six months of working may work. For other types of coaching, people may find it beneficial to work with a coach for a longer period. Factors that may impact the length of time include: the types of goals, the ways individuals or teams prefer to work, the frequency of coaching meetings and financial resources available to support coaching.

How do you ensure a compatible partnership?

Overall, be prepared to design the coaching partnership with the coach. For example, think of a strong partnership that you currently have in your work or life. Look at how you built that relationship and what is important to you about partnership. You will want to build those same things into a coaching relationship. Here are a few other tips:

- Interview more than one coach to determine "what feels right" in terms of the chemistry. Coaches are accustomed to being interviewed, and an introductory conversation of this type is usually free of charge.
- Look for stylistic similarities and differences between the coach and you and how these might support your growth as an individual or the growth of your team.
- Discuss your goals for coaching within the context of the coach's specialty or the coach's preferred way of working with an individual or team
- Talk with the coach about what to do if you ever feel things are not going well; make some agreements up front on how to handle questions or problems.
- Remember that coaching is a partnership, so be assertive about talking with the coach about any concerns.

Within the partnership, what does the coach do? The individual?

The coach:

- Provides objective assessment and observations that foster the individual's or team's self-awareness and awareness of others
- Listens closely to fully understand the individual's or team's circumstances
- Acts as a sounding board in exploring possibilities and implementing thoughtful planning and decision making
- Champions opportunities and potential, encouraging stretch and challenge commensurate with personal strengths and aspirations
- Fosters shifts in thinking that reveal fresh perspectives,
- Challenges blind spots to illuminate new possibilities and support the creation of alternative scenarios
- Maintains professional boundaries in the coaching relationship, including confidentiality, and adheres to the coaching profession's code of ethics.

The individual:

- Creates the coaching agenda based on personally meaningful coaching goals
- Uses assessment and observations to enhance self-awareness and awareness of others
- Envisions personal and/or organizational success
- Assumes full responsibility for personal decisions and actions
- Utilizes the coaching process to promote possibility thinking and fresh perspectives
- Takes courageous action in alignment with personal goals and aspirations
- Engages big-picture thinking and problem-solving skills
- Takes the tools, concepts, models and principles provided by the coach and engages in effective forward actions

What does coaching ask of an individual?

To be successful, coaching asks certain things, all of which begin with intention. Additionally, clients should:

- Focus on one's self, the tough questions, the hard truths and one's success.
- Observe the behaviors and communications of others.
- Listen to one's intuition, assumptions, judgments, and to the way one sounds when one speaks
- Challenge existing attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and develop new ones that serve one's goals in a superior way
- Leverage personal strengths and overcome limitations to develop a winning style
- Take decisive actions, however uncomfortable and in spite of personal insecurities, to reach for the extraordinary
- Show compassion for one's self while learning new behaviors and experiencing setbacks, and to show that compassion for others as they do the same
- Commit to not take one's self so seriously, using humor to lighten and brighten any situation
- Maintain composure in the face of disappointment and unmet expectations, avoiding emotional reactivity
- Have the courage to reach for more than before while engaging in continual self examination without fear

How can the success of the coaching process be measured?

Measurement may be thought of in two distinct ways: external indicators of performance and internal indicators of success. Ideally, both are incorporated.

Examples of external measures include achievement of coaching goals established at the outset of the coaching relationship, increased income/revenue, obtaining a promotion, performance feedback that is obtained from a sample of the individual's constituents (e.g., direct reports, colleagues, customers, boss, the manager him/herself), personal and/or business performance data (e.g., productivity, efficiency measures). The external measures selected should be things the individual is already measuring and has some ability to directly influence.

Examples of internal measures include self-scoring/self-validating assessments that can be administered initially and at regular intervals in the coaching process, changes in the individual's self-awareness and awareness of others, shifts in thinking that create more effective actions, and shifts in one's emotional state that inspire confidence.

What factors should be considered when looking at the financial investment in coaching?

Working with a coach requires both a personal commitment of time and energy as well as a financial commitment. Fees charged vary by specialty and by the level of experience of the coach. Individuals should consider both the desired benefits as well as the anticipated length of time to be spent in coaching. Since the coaching relationship is predicated on clear communication, any financial concerns or questions should be voiced in initial conversations before the agreement is made. The [ICF Coach Referral Service](#) allows you to search for a coach based on a number of qualifications, including fee range.

