

## **Put Me in Coach, I'm Ready to Play**

**By David Herron**

My kids have a soccer coach. My wife has a fitness coach. My dog even has a behavior coach. What about me? Do I need a coach; and if so, what for?

Have you noticed an increase in the number of articles on professional and personal coaching? I certainly have. The articles are interesting and the topic peaked my curiosity. What exactly was meant by professional and personal coaching? Who are these coaches and who is getting coached? And most importantly, am I missing out on something! To find out more about coaching I enrolled in a two day seminar on coaching presented by OnTrack Coaching and Consulting in Newton, MA. ([www.ontrackcoaching.com](http://www.ontrackcoaching.com)).

**What is coaching?** It turns out that coaching covers a wide range of services. There is Executive Coaching, Leadership Coaching, Life Coaching, Team Coaching, Career Coaching, on and on. Coaching can be used to support personal and/or professional goals. The International Coaching Federation ([www.coachfederation.org](http://www.coachfederation.org)) defines coaching as “an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives.” Coaching assumes that the client is resourceful and therefore is 100% responsible for the results produced. The coaching relationship is often described as a ‘designed alliance’ helping the client to identify new choices by seeing new perspectives and then creating a plan that will get them to take action. Coaching is not consulting (telling them what to do) nor is it mentoring (hand holding). Think of the coach as an enabler. Creating a safe environment whereby the client can think creatively and constructively without fear of criticism, judgment or failure. A good coach will listen and observe and then customize their approach to individual client needs.

**What happens during a coaching session?** First of all, coaching isn't typically a single session but rather a series of sessions extended over an agreed upon period of time. The whole idea behind coaching is to identify goals that are important to the client and then to create a plan of action that will create change. A coaching engagement may last for a month or it may extend for a number of months. The specific timeframe is usually agreed to in the first coaching session. Along with agreeing to an appropriate timeframe for the coaching activity, the first session typically includes completing a client profile, developing a mutual understanding regarding the role of the coach and the role of the client, and completing a life or business assessment based on 8-10 categories such as satisfaction with career, health, friends, personal growth, job stability. Using the results of the assessment and some additional discovery techniques such as value clarification, personal inventory and future self vision exercises help the client and coach arrive at the goal(s) that they will focus on going forward.

The short cut way of thinking about the initial session is simply to consider three basic questions:

- What keeps you up at night?
- What would it be like if that was fixed?
- What would it take to fix it?

Voila! You now create an action plan and get to work.

In subsequent sessions the coach's responsibility is to listen, encourage, establish mutually accepted commitments based on actions necessary to achieve the stated goals, and monitor forward progress. The coach will explore and help you to expand on ideas. From time to time the coach may make a suggestion or offer advice, but only with the permission of the client. The only agenda a coach has is your agenda!

**How do you know if you need a coach?** The best way to answer this question should not be based on the perspective of needing a coach but wanting a coach based on need. Once again the need may be personal or it may be professional. There may be something in your life that you want or should do but you don't have the time or the attention to get it done. Perhaps you have a new job and you are having trouble going through the transition. Maybe your physical health is concerning you because all you do is work and never have time to get to the exercise club. We can all think of something in our lives or professions that should be getting more attention. If you can't think of anything the coach can help you with that as well. Through a series of exercises, tools and techniques a good coach can help you identify and, more importantly, clarify one or two goals that you agree to focus on. They don't have to be anything major or monumental. The value or the need for a coach will become obvious to you once the goal(s) have been identified. At that point you can determine for yourself if you want to move forward. The client needs to be open minded and accept feedback and be willing to create change. If not, coaching may not be the answer. It takes a commitment and in some cases courage, but the process can be very beneficial.

**What are the benefits of being coached?** While there are no guarantees, it is hard to imagine that one wouldn't benefit from some form of coaching. Coaching will enable you to establish and take action towards achieving your goals. Those who want to move forward will get the most out of the coaching experience. As a result you will become more self-confident and develop a greater sense of self. You will achieve greater personal and job satisfaction. A good coach will serve in part as your personal cheerleader encouraging you to act more responsibly by taking accountability for your actions. You will find that you are more likely to make and meet important commitments and improve your ability to communicate more effectively.

**So now what?** Do I need a coach? I recently sold my Software Measurement and Management consulting business that I had been working 24/7 for the past twelve years. I sure could have used a coach during some of those years. And certainly I met many a CIO and senior manager that could have used the services of a good coach. I discovered that for me the transition period was particularly difficult. I sold the business with the idea in mind that I would retire early and enjoy the fruits of my labor. But I found that after twelve years of running a business walking away is not that easy. It was difficult for me to relax; after all there must be a problem to solve somewhere! I have spent my professional life consulting executives, mentoring consultants, and leading a company through various changes. I needed a coach. I needed someone to help me get off the couch and get to work. And then it hit me – the difference between couch and coach is 'u' (sorry about that, I couldn't resist). So I jumped off the couch and I jumped into coaching.

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