

If You Don't Play A Sport, Why Hire A Coach?

By Carol Kerr, Certified Coach and Corporate Trainer

Why is it that major organizations around the world are investing millions of dollars in individual coaching for their executives? What is the R.O.I. of coaching? How does coaching differ from therapy? How can someone who is not an expert in a given field coach someone in that field? Is coaching a fad or an evolution of our culture? Let's examine these and some other questions and see whether we can figure out why there is so much buzz about coaching.



The best coaches are those who ask the most questions and provide the fewest answers!

First, what is coaching? Neither Webster online (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm>) nor Dictionary.com (www.dictionary.com) offer an adequate definition of the word *coach* as we use it in business today. Webster alludes only to sports training, and Dictionary.com offers *teach* or *train* as possible definitions of *coach*. However, executive, or personal coaching is not training or teaching. *Advising* comes closer, but perhaps the best one word definition of coach is *questioning*. Business and personal coaching is the guided stimulation of intense mental exercise brought about through deep, relevant inquiry. A good coach is a good *questioner*.

Why Questions? Why Not Answers?

The coaching process is a journey into one's own mind. Coaching methodology is based on the principle that clients know most of what they need to perform at a higher level, lead happier and healthier lives, improve their relationships, and accelerate their growth. Everyone has barriers to achieving their highest potential and the view from within may be literally cluttered with "obstacle illusions." Coaching helps clients clear the clutter so they can see their strengths and find solutions that move them past challenges they once saw as insurmountable. By providing a supportive, private environment and asking probing questions, coaches unveil the client's own best knowledge. Weekly sessions provide structure, focus and accountability that help them "move out of thought and into action."

Sounds Like Therapy to Me!

Is coaching therapy? No. The coaching relationship is a partnership between equals. A therapist-patient relationship has a hierarchy with the therapist as superior. Coaches meet their clients in the present and journey with them into their future. People who are stuck in the past may need

psychological services before they can benefit from coaching. Coaching is for mentally healthy, people who want to improve their results. The decision to be coached is a proactive one, whereas the decision to get into therapy is almost always reactive --one made out of pain, and perhaps even desperation.

What is the Return on Investment for Coaching?

On an hourly basis, coaching may sound quite expensive. But if so, **why do businesses and individuals invest in coaching?** Simply because it pays off. The **Jack Phillips ROI study in 2001 reported average returns of \$4.52 for every dollar spent on coaching.** Triad Performance Technologies, Inc. evaluated the effects of coaching on sales managers within a large telecom organization. **Their research cites a 10:1 return on investment in less than one year.** The study found that the following were directly attributable to the coaching intervention:

- Top performers who considered leaving were retained, resulting in reduced turnover, increased revenue.
- A positive work environment was created, focusing on account development and higher sales volume.
- Customer revenues and satisfaction were improved.
- Revenues increased, due to improved performance and exceeding goals.

Quite simply, coaching works better than training alone because it is succeeds in changing individual behavior over time. Compare that to an expensive one day seminar in which everyone "sees the light," makes a few minor changes and then returns to their old behaviors within a few weeks!

Thousands of Coaches--Very Few Experts

Sometimes people ask me where to find an expert coach in their field. While some situations may require specific expertise, pure coaching is based on the premise that the coach will facilitate self-discovery and help her client tap into their own knowledge and resources. Consider Bella Caroli--one of the greatest gymnastic coaches of our times. Bella was never a gymnast. Business coaches tap into the client's knowledge base, not our own. Often the perspective of an "outsider" proves helpful and opens up a dimension that a fellow expert may not be able to see.

This Too Shall Pass! Isn't Coaching Just a Fad?

I see coaching as less of a fad than an evolution of our culture. Throughout history, there have been coaches. Socrates was one of the greatest coaches. He led students to new levels of understanding by asking questions that made them think deeply. Facilitation and coaching are modeled after his style, and are called the *Socratic Method*. Coaching is not

a fad: It is a modality whose time has come. Our minds are filled with unlimited potential and more knowledge than we could possibly be aware of. By putting our minds through weekly exercise, coaching taps that potential and moves us forward.

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