

From CoachVille's SOC Member News – July 2004

Hey, New Coaches – You Don't Have To Do It All At Once

By Sue Johnston, for the CoachVille "Newbie" Community

The "To Do" list of a new coach can be so long that simply *reading* it seems to take all day. Might as well forget finding time to do any of the activities listed.

We're simultaneously learning the business, marketing the business, and actually doing the business of coaching. We're like circus jugglers. Keeping all three new and unfamiliar balls in the air requires focus, energy, and information.

Ooops! Just dropped a ball.

Like most coaches (whether they're new or just haven't reached "guru status") I look to more experienced coaches for ideas. I meet these inspiring people at conferences, read their books, and visit their web sites, where they list strings of credentials, certifications, and affiliations. Their services include coaching gyms, multiple teleclasses, e-books, assessments, and boot camps in exotic locales. Their marketing tools include e-zines, conference keynotes, white papers, sound-enabled slide presentations, and (my personal favourite) book tours. With each cool new idea, I think, "Gotta get *me* one of those!"

Sound familiar? Before one more item goes on the "To Do" list – and we hear the sound of another ball dropping – a new coach needs to pause and remember that these marvellous coaching businesses didn't burst into glory overnight. These coaches got where they are one step at a time.

"What do I do first?" That's the question on many of the enquiring minds that show up in the learning and practice building groups I belong to – and anywhere new coaches gather. New coaches have to make careful choices about how to invest their time and their money in building their businesses. Otherwise, there's a risk we'll spread ourselves so thin that we'll become invisible. You don't need an MBA to know that's not a great marketing strategy.

Over the past few weeks, I've been trying to establish a template for a balanced approach to building a coaching business – some formula for getting the right mix of learning, marketing and actual coaching.

I recall some brilliant advice Dave Buck shared with us at the 2004 CoachVille Conference, in June. He said something like, "Whatever you do, don't write a book in your first year as a coach." That one statement removed a large, heavy item from any ambitious new coach's "To Do" list, but it was part of a much larger message that each of us should find our own way to market and operate our business. Do what is comfortable for you and what will work for your clients. Don't do stuff because someone else does.

Dave also reminded us that there's no need for a new coach to develop original material for a coaching program. CoachVille has a series of coaching programs, already packaged, for which SOC members are already licensed. A new coach can use that material to get his or her practice started. The all singing, all dancing, all original intellectual property designed exclusively by you can come later – if it's needed at all.

Simple message – you don't have to do it all at once. That's a good thing, because you can't do it all at once. I know; I tried. I had an e-zine and a chat room and a growing library of articles on my web site that had all started as speeches that I was trying to turn into e-books that would turn into

teleclasses that would turn into coaching programs that would turn into best sellers that would turn into a major motion picture that would turn into an appearance on Oprah – and I wasn't doing any coaching. I wasn't helping anyone. I wasn't learning much. And I wasn't having any fun.

I paused to recall why I started this business. Then I noticed that I had dropped all three balls – learning, marketing and coaching. In the weeks since I picked them up, I've been thinking of these three balls as one of those ubiquitous CoachVille Venn diagrams. The places where two balls overlap are good places to pursue activities.

The Learning/Coaching overlap

Think of some area of life you're already good at or interested in. Learn more about it. Start a coaching program around it. You'll build confidence more quickly since you've already developed expertise. (One definition of "expert" is "someone who knows more than most people." We can do that!)

The Coaching/Marketing overlap

Be your own client. Coach yourself to work with your strengths. Start with one marketing approach you think you might be good at and get really good at it. Like writing? Start a modest e-zine or a blog, and focus your attention there. Like speaking, offer free "Lunch'n'Learn" sessions at the library or corner café. Like running meetings? Start a forum for people interested in one of the areas you coach on – or a support group for new entrepreneurs, such as yourself. If you focus on one thing at a time, it won't feel so overwhelming.

The Marketing/Learning overlap

Now coach yourself to step out of your comfort zone. Pick one marketing approach you would never consider. Cold calling. Then warm it up by creating language ("elevator statement" and such) that describes your work. Find appropriate times to let people know what you do. These days, I'm having luck with, "In my other life, I'm a business coach. If I was wearing that hat, I'd ask you ..." People say, "Oh really? Tell me more."

The central intersection

Business growth, for a new coach, will come at the place where all three balls overlap. Using a strategy where you trust your instincts and start with what you're good can ensure that more of your activities originate in that place. You'll be a master juggler!

(Note: In mastering the "new coach juggling act," CoachVille's "Newbies" Community at <http://CID295.cvcommunity.com> is a source of help and inspiration.)

New Coach Challenge

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