

Who're you going to call?

Ten reasons to hire a coach

By Sue Johnston



At one time, Tiger Woods had four coaches. Magic Johnson had six. Lance Armstrong's coach is in the cycling hall of fame. Performers Céline Dion and Will Smith have them. I have one.

Coaches are people who help us get good, better, and best at what we do. They help us reach our goals, whether that's winning the Masters or an Oscar, running a business, or living a life of balance and joy.

How I got involved

I first learned about coaching when my husband announced that he and the other execs where he worked were being assigned a coach. That coach suggested my education, personality, and approach to life might make me a good coach, too. I was finishing my MBA and wondering what to do next. So I started investigating, reading, and learning about the profession.

A friend, though I knew her only slightly back then, did me the great favour of letting me coach her on developing her business. Watching her progress was truly exciting, as we sorted out her priorities and made plans. So I enrolled in coach training and committed to my own dream of helping other people truly express who they are in their work and in the world.

What can a coach help you with?

1. Sorting things out

Life today is complicated. There once was a time when work was *here*, home was *there*, priorities were set for you, and life ran along in a predictable fashion. It might not have been as exciting as today, but you knew where you were going.

Today, the demands of work, life, recreation, and community are intertwined in what often resembles a tangled ball of string. We can be overwhelmed by all our commitments – and by our opportunities.

2. Getting things moving

Sometimes we want to learn something, like how to manage our money, or our time, write a business plan, market our services, or talk to our employees. Sometimes we've read a dozen books with titles like, "Transform Your Life In 30 Days" or listened to those Tony Robbins CDs twice, yet we're still stuck in a rut. Sometimes, we feel like a hummingbird, flitting from idea to idea, flying but not necessarily moving forward.

3. Adjusting the environment

Sometimes, we just don't feel we can be ourselves. Laura Young, an experienced and creative coach and friend says, "It's like you're a fish who's trying to live in a tree."

If you feel as if you must try really hard to fit into your life, your coach helps you build a more "supportive environment," putting you in touch with tools, techniques, information, and people that will help you move ahead.

4. Being objective

A coach is an objective, sympathetic person with whom you have an ongoing relationship, but who doesn't have a vested interest in what you do.

Yesterday, a friend described her husband's reaction when she mentioned she might hire a coach. "Don't I do that for you?" Well, Hon, spouses, parents, friends, and bosses can't always be objective. They have a vision of who you are (or who they want you to be) that may not coincide with your dream.

My husband's vision supports my dream, but he doesn't ask me what actions I've taken this week to make that dream come true. My coach is never shy about asking that question.

5. Sharing perspective

Imagine having someone, outside the complex web of your daily interactions, who can see what's really going on and share the news with you.

Just as Tiger Woods' coach watches him swing, your coach looks objectively at what you're doing. Talking to you, your coach can see patterns in your behaviour and your thinking that you can't see. When these patterns come to your attention, you can take action.

6. Listening and questioning

Most coaches work with you by phone. My coach is miles away. I thought this was going to be really weird. How can she help me if she can't see me? You'd be surprised how well you hear when you have nothing to look at. You can even hear things that haven't been said yet.

But our calls involve more than listening. She asks provocative questions that help me see things in a new light. She suggests research activities, or shares something that's worked for her. Sometimes she makes powerful requests for action – to which I can agree or not.

7. Finding your strengths

A coach is less interested in fixing what's "wrong" with you than in helping you discover and use the things that are great. This notion that a person could go from good to great by focussing on strengths, rather than weaknesses, was a breakthrough for me. Like many coaches, this is at the heart of my practice.

Using assessment tools, such as the Strengths Finder, Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, the EQ Map, Leadership 360°, and other self-rated or other-rated surveys, your coach can help you notice things about the way you or your team operate, communicate, or look at the world. This awareness is the first step in understanding how to use your and others' unique talents effectively.

8. Helping you improve

Most of us have already experienced coaching in other contexts and know its benefits. If you played a sport, your coach helped you develop your technique and taught you to keep your eye on the ball. If you played an instrument, your coach taught you tricks to remember the notes and exercises to strengthen your fingers.

The coaching we received, back then, turned us from beginners to accomplished participants in things we loved. Our coaches came up with the ideas, but we did the work. And, when we succeeded, the victory was *ours*.

Why then, as adults and working people, shouldn't we enjoy the benefits of coaching? Is our work or life less important than playing an instrument or winning a game? Couldn't we all use a little help in discovering more clarity, focus, or confidence? Wouldn't we all like greater results in a shorter period of time? These are things a coach can help with.

9. Keeping you inspired

What's both mysterious and exciting about being coached is that the very act of engaging someone else to work on a goal with you makes you take it seriously. Since I've been working with my coach, I've tackled things I was afraid to try before. And I'm coming up with ideas I would never have thought of without her help. And I see this in my own clients.

You have to be ready for coaching. Willing to invest the time in yourself and your goals. Willing to try on new ideas and make changes in the way you operate. You also need to have a sense of the results you want.

Above all, you must *want* to be the person you *know* you can become.

10. Helping you take action

I'm going to make a powerful request of you. If you want to be the person you know you can become, call me about coaching.

I won't try to talk you into coaching with me. We'll just have a conversation about your goals and how coaching can help. I can even refer you to other coaches if I think they can serve you better.

We're all on a journey through this life. It *can* be to a place where we feel useful and joyful – and not only our *best* self but also our *true* self.

But motion requires action. A coach helps you take action. Imagine you're making that journey on a bicycle. If you're moving ahead and you're not pedalling, you're probably going downhill.

Start pedalling. Take action. Call me. Learn what coaching can do for you.

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