

## Coaching Article I—Coaching—What Makes it Successful

The start of a New Year is a good time to think about coaching. How often do we all use the New Year holiday season to assess our life, examine our passions, resolve to change some nagging habit, and/or create something new? How often do we lose sight of those desired changes after a few weeks or few months into the New Year? Consider the sustaining power that often comes with having a personal or business coach.

Breathe into that for a few minutes. Really. Take a deep breath. Think about a change you would like to make in your life or your career. What would it be like to have a coach on your path to serve as a guide? Where do you begin to find such a person? There are a myriad of professional coaches out there. Just Google the words “professional coach” and a list of specialties appear. Open a few web sites and you could easily get lost. There are sports coaches, life coaches, personal coaches, business coaches, creativity coaches, and even dating coaches. How would you go about choosing a coach for a personal or business issue you have?

Start by understanding what coaching is. There are as many definitions of coaching as there are types of coaches. In business or personal coaching, some of common elements used to define coaching are:

- One-on-one relationship between the person and the coach
- Specific goal(s) for change are set and usually focus on performance or personal development of an individual, often for the good of the organization.
- Process or methodology to identify needed changes, create self awareness, and practice new behaviors.
- Mode of sustaining the changes after the coaching relationship ends.

In my training as an Integral Coach® coaching is defined as “a discipline that enables clients to become more aware of their current approach to situations, to see new possibilities and then build sustainable new competencies to achieve outcomes that deeply matter to them. The coach and client are dedicated to the unique development needs of the client.”

The benefit of having such a person and process seems obvious, whatever the change is you want to make. But as an executive coach I am often asked—“How I will know that coaching is successful, and that it will be worth the investment.” The answer to that question is that there is no one thing that defines “success” in coaching. Rather, there are many building blocks along the way. Knowing them upfront can help you find a good coach and begin your own personal transformation.

First, a skilled coach should help one examine the presenting issue, or desire for change, and consider how coaching can impact the change. A success measure is when a coach can help determine whether coaching is the right solution to the presenting problem and to make sure there are realistic expectations of the change.

The next building block for success in coaching is finding the right coach and establishing a relationship. It is essential the person meet the coach and have some chemistry. This means the person needs to be

able to establish rapport and needs to trust the person's expertise and approach. The coach has to trust the client is serious about making changes and has a certain commitment to engage in the process. The person does not have to like the coach for the process to be successful, although this helps.

Another measure of success in coaching is accurately defining the development needs. It is a process that is done with the person and may also involve the person's boss or organization. It involves assessing the competencies of the person and making decisions about which competencies need to be developed for the coaching topic and in what order. A coach will often use a combination of assessments to gain insight into the person's cognitive, interpersonal, and work styles, as well as their hopes, aspirations, and passions. A skillful coach guides the person by:

- Exploring what their current way of being/doing allows for and what it closes down.
- Defining new competencies needed for the desired changes.
- Identifying the new "muscles" needed to develop in the competency.
- Designing developmental exercises to practice and build the new muscles.

The real work of change is done by the person. The degree to which the person does the work of learning and practicing will help determine success. The responsibility for success that rests with the client includes:

- Engaging in awareness building exercises and developmental practices.
- Reflecting often by studying patterns, understanding limiting thoughts and behaviors, setting intentions, gaining new insights, and creating and acting on a wider range of possibilities.
- Integrating old habits and patterns that have served them well, shedding those that have limited them, and transcending their old ways with new awareness, competencies and practices.

You won't know if coaching will be successful when you first decide to try it. You won't know if it is worth the investment. But by using these guidelines, you should know what to look for—a skilled, qualified coach; a methodology that is clear; determination on your part to integrate the strengths you have and transcending them as you build new behaviors; and a means to sustain change. It is a New Year and even a new decade. Take a deep breath. Visualize a coach walking beside you on your path.