

Discover: Coaching!



Finding the Right Coach for You

by Tony Stoltzfus

If you've never looked for a coach before, you might be wondering where to start. What qualifications do you look for? How is a coaching relationship usually set up? What should it cost? How do I know this coach knows what he or she is doing? And how do I figure out if this person is the right fit for me and for my needs?

Here are some tips on how to go about choosing the right coach for you. We'll start by looking at how to match your needs to a coach's skills, and then talk about three key things to look for in a coach.

Finding the Match

Before you start looking for a coach, define what you want out of the coaching relationship. Do you want to be coached in business skills or in your spiritual life? In pursuing your dreams or in losing weight and getting on a healthy diet? Each coach has his or her own niche: often a place where that individual has extensive experience or a strong life message. If you are launching a business, you may prefer a coach with an entrepreneurial background and additional qualifications in the business arena. If you are a pastor wanting to grow your church, a coach with ministry experience and access to ministry or church growth tools may be what you want. If you're a single mom struggling to balance career and family, someone who's been there may be able to believe in you like no one else.

Think too about the kind of approach you want to take to your own growth. A *performance coaching* approach focuses on getting things done. If you want to improve productivity, realign your priorities, increase your sales totals or change a habit, a coach who focuses on this would be a good match. *Transformational coaching* works at outward change by focusing first on inward change. What you do is a reflection of who you are. If you are in a transitional season or want to work at character change, look for a coach who talks about transformation. Life coaches focus on your personal life: finding and fulfilling your destiny, leading a joyful, balanced life, identifying what you really want and pursuing it.

And there are also specialty coaches: relationship coaches work with marriages or dating relationships; nutritional coaches work with diet and health issues, career coaches work with job transitions – there are even ADD coaches for those who specialize in improving the lives of those with ADD. Find out what your coach considers to be his or her strengths, and be honest about who you are and what you feel you need. Most coaches are clear on their personal strengths and are very generous about referring you if what you want isn't what they are best at.

What to Look for in a Coach

Here are three basic things to look for to find a great coach:

1. Qualifications

Coaching has become something of a buzzword, and many individuals without coaching credentials or even any formal training call themselves coaches. Coaching is completely different than mentoring or counseling, and experience in one of these related areas *does not qualify one as a coach*. Find out what type of training your coach has. If you are paying for coaching, do yourself a

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favor and work with some with a professional coaching certification from a reputable coaching school. This credential means your coach has been through 100 or more hours of formal coach training with a professional trainer. It takes time to learn to coach well!

2. Experience

Coaching titles reflect the experience level of the coach. For instance, the standard language in the coaching industry is 100 or more hours of experience for a "certified coach", while a "master coach" has accumulated at least 2500 hours. However, not all coaches follow these recommendations, so it's best to just ask how many hours or how many clients this coach has had. The best coaching is generally going to come from more experienced coaches—but usually at a higher rate as well.

It is also very helpful for the coach to have life experience in your field or in the area you want to work on. For instance, a leader who has been through a wilderness experience will generally do a better job coaching you on your own pilgrimage through it.

3. Professionalism

A professional approach is a sign of a good coach. Complimentary sessions that let you "try before you buy" a coach's services are common. Don't be hesitant to meet with two or three coaches before you make a choice: kicking the tires is an accepted part of the process. A great coach will often even encourage you to check out others before you make a decision. And look for things like a written contract and a formal intake procedure to kick off the relationship. Attention to these kinds of details tells you the coach is serious about what he or she is doing