

# ICF Coaching FAQs

The following is a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs). Should you have any additional questions, please contact ICF Headquarters at [icfheadquarters@coachfederation.org](mailto:icfheadquarters@coachfederation.org).

## **What is professional coaching?**

The ICF defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaching honors the client as the expert in his/her life and work and believes that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole. Standing on this foundation, the coach's responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve;
- Encourage client self-discovery;
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies; and
- Hold the client responsible and accountable.

Coaches are trained to listen, to observe and to customize their approach to individual client needs. They seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.

## **How can you determine if coaching is right for you?**

To determine if you could benefit from coaching, start by summarizing what you would expect to accomplish in coaching. When someone has a fairly clear idea of the desired outcome, a coaching partnership can be a useful tool for developing a strategy for how to achieve that outcome with greater ease.

Since coaching is a partnership, also ask yourself if you find it valuable to collaborate, to have another viewpoint and to be asked to consider new perspectives. Also, ask yourself if you are ready to devote the time and the energy to making real changes in your work or life. If the answer to these questions is yes, then coaching may be a beneficial way for you to grow and develop.

## **How is coaching distinct from other service professions?**

Professional coaching is a distinct service which focuses on an individual's life as it relates to goal setting, outcome creation and personal change management. In an effort to understand what a coach is, it can be helpful to distinguish coaching from other professions that provide personal or organizational support.

- **Therapy:** Coaching can be distinguished from therapy in a number of ways. First, coaching is a profession that supports personal and professional growth and development based on individual-initiated change in pursuit of specific actionable outcomes. These outcomes are linked to personal or professional success. Coaching is forward moving and future focused. Therapy, on the other hand, deals with healing pain, dysfunction and conflict within an individual or a relationship between two or more individuals. The focus is often on resolving difficulties arising from the past which hamper an individual's emotional functioning in the present, improving overall psychological functioning, and dealing with present life and work circumstances in more emotionally healthy ways. Therapy outcomes often include improved emotional/feeling states. While positive feelings/emotions may be a natural outcome of coaching, the primary

focus is on creating actionable strategies for achieving specific goals in one's work or personal life. The emphasis in a coaching relationship is on action, accountability and follow through.

- **Consulting:** Consultants may be retained by individuals or organizations for the purpose of accessing specialized expertise. While consulting approaches vary widely, there is often an assumption that the consultant diagnoses problems and prescribes and sometimes implements solutions. In general, the assumption with coaching is that individuals or teams are capable of generating their own solutions, with the coach supplying supportive, discovery-based approaches and frameworks.
- **Mentoring:** Mentoring, which can be thought of as guiding from one's own experience or sharing of experience in a specific area of industry or career development, is sometimes confused with coaching. Although some coaches provide mentoring as part of their coaching, such as in mentor coaching new coaches, coaches are not typically mentors to those they coach.
- **Training:** Training programs are based on the acquisition of certain learning objectives as set out by the trainer or instructor. Though objectives are clarified in the coaching process, they are set by the individual or team being coached with guidance provided by the coach. Training also assumes a linear learning path which coincides with an established curriculum. Coaching is less linear without a set curriculum plan.
- **Athletic Development:** Though sports metaphors are often used, professional coaching is different from the traditional sports coach. The athletic coach is often seen as an expert who guides and directs the behavior of individuals or teams based on his or her greater experience and knowledge. Professional coaches possess these qualities, but it is the experience and knowledge of the individual or team that determines the direction. Additionally, professional coaching, unlike athletic development, does not focus on behaviors that are being executed poorly or incorrectly. Instead, the focus is on identifying opportunity for development based on individual strengths and capabilities.

#### **What are some typical reasons someone might work with a coach?**

There are many reasons that an individual or team might choose to work with a coach, including but not limited to the following:

- There is something at stake (a challenge, stretch goal or opportunity), and it is urgent, compelling or exciting or all of the above;
- There is a gap in knowledge, skills, confidence, or resources;
- There is a desire to accelerate results;
- There is a lack of clarity, and there are choices to be made;
- The individual is extremely successful, and success has started to become problematic;
- Work and life are out of balance, and this is creating unwanted consequences; or
- One has not identified his or her core strengths and how best to leverage them.

#### **What has caused the tremendous growth in the coaching industry?**

Coaching has grown significantly for many reasons. Generally the world has changed a lot, and coaching is a useful tool to deal with many of those changes. For example, coaching is a great tool for today's challenging job market. There is more job transition, more self-employment and small business. Some of the real life factors include:

- Rapid changes in the external business environment;
- Downsizing, restructuring, mergers and other organizational changes have radically altered what has been termed the "traditional employment contract"-

companies can no longer achieve results using traditional management approaches;

- There is a growing shortage of talented employees in certain industries-to attract and retain top talent, companies must commit to investing in individuals' development;
- There is a widening disparity between what managers were trained to do and what their jobs now require them to do in order to meet increasing demands for competitive results;
- There is unrest on the part of many employees and leaders in many companies-people are wrestling with fears around job insecurity and increased workplace pressures to perform at higher levels than ever before;
- Companies must develop inclusive, collaborative work environments, in order to achieve strategic business goals, and to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction; and
- Individuals who have experienced the excellent results of coaching are talking to more people about coaching. In short, coaching helps people focus on what matters most to them in life: business and personal. People today are more open to the idea of being in charge of their own lives. Coaching helps people do just that; so the industry continues to grow.

### **How is coaching delivered? What does the process look like?**

The Coaching Process-Coaching typically begins with a personal interview (either face-to-face or by teleconference call) to assess the individual's current opportunities and challenges, define the scope of the relationship, identify priorities for action, and establish specific desired outcomes. Subsequent coaching sessions may be conducted in person or over the telephone, with each session lasting a previously established length of time. Between scheduled coaching sessions, the individual may be asked to complete specific actions that support the achievement of one's personally prioritized goals. The coach may provide additional resources in the form of relevant articles, checklists, assessments, or models, to support the individual's thinking and actions. The duration of the coaching relationship varies depending on the individual's personal needs and preferences.

- **Assessments:** A variety of assessments are available to support the coaching process, depending upon the needs and circumstances of the individual. Assessments provide objective information which can enhance the individual's self-awareness as well as awareness of others and their circumstances, provide a benchmark for creating coaching goals and actionable strategies, and offer a method for evaluating progress.
- **Concepts, models and principles:** A variety of concepts, models and principles drawn from the behavioral sciences, management literature, spiritual traditions and/or the arts and humanities, may be incorporated into the coaching conversation in order to increase the individual's self-awareness and awareness of others, foster shifts in perspective, promote fresh insights, provide new frameworks for looking at opportunities and challenges, and energize and inspire the individual's forward actions.
- **Appreciative approach:** Coaching incorporates an appreciative approach. The appreciative approach is grounded in what's right, what's working, what's wanted, and what's needed to get there. Using an appreciative approach, the coach models constructive communication skills and methods the individual or team can utilize to enhance personal communication effectiveness. The appreciative approach incorporates discovery-based inquiry, proactive (as opposed to reactive) ways of managing personal opportunities and challenges, constructive framing of observations and feedback in order to elicit the most positive responses from others, and envisioning success as contrasted with

focusing on problems. The appreciative approach is simple to understand and employ, but its effects in harnessing possibility thinking and goal-oriented action can be profound.

### **How long does a coach work with an individual?**

The length of a coaching partnership varies depending on the individual's or team's needs and preferences. For certain types of focused coaching, 3 to 6 months of working with a coach may work. For other types of coaching, people may find it beneficial to work with a coach for a longer period. Factors that may impact the length of time include: the types of goals, the ways individuals or teams like to work, the frequency of coaching meetings, and financial resources available to support coaching.

### **How do you ensure a compatible partnership?**

Overall, be prepared to design the coaching partnership with the coach. For example, think of a strong partnership that you currently have in your work or life. Look at how you built that relationship and what is important to you about partnership. You will want to build those same things into a coaching relationship. Here are a few other tips:

- Have a personal interview with one or more coaches to determine "what feels right" in terms of the chemistry. Coaches are accustomed to being interviewed, and there is generally no charge for an introductory conversation of this type.
- Look for stylistic similarities and differences between the coach and you and how these might support your growth as an individual or the growth of your team.
- Discuss your goals for coaching within the context of the coach's specialty or the coach's preferred way of working with a individual or team  
Talk with the coach about what to do if you ever feel things are not going well; make some agreements up front on how to handle questions or problems.
- Remember that coaching is a partnership, so be assertive about talking with the coach about anything that is of concern at any time.

### **Within the partnership, what does the coach do? The individual?**

The role of the coach is to provide objective assessment and observations that foster the individual's or team members' enhanced self-awareness and awareness of others, practice astute listening in order to garner a full understanding of the individual's or team's circumstances, be a sounding board in support of possibility thinking and thoughtful planning and decision making, champion opportunities and potential, encourage stretch and challenge commensurate with personal strengths and aspirations, foster the shifts in thinking that reveal fresh perspectives, challenge blind spots in order to illuminate new possibilities, and support the creation of alternative scenarios. Finally, the coach maintains professional boundaries in the coaching relationship, including confidentiality, and adheres to the coaching profession's code of ethics.

The role of the individual or team is to create the coaching agenda based on personally meaningful coaching goals, utilize assessment and observations to enhance self-awareness and awareness of others, envision personal and/or organizational success, assume full responsibility for personal decisions and actions, utilize the coaching process to promote possibility thinking and fresh perspectives, take courageous action in alignment with personal goals and aspirations, engage big picture thinking and problem solving skills, and utilize the tools, concepts, models and principles provided by the coach to engage effective forward actions.

**What does coaching ask of an individual?** To be successful, coaching asks certain things of the individual, all of which begin with intention. Additionally, clients should:

- Focus-on one's self, the tough questions, the hard truths--and one's success.
- Observe-the behaviors and communications of others.
- Listening-to one's intuition, assumptions, judgments, and to the way one sounds when one speaks.
- Self discipline-to challenge existing attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and to develop new ones which serve one's goals in a superior way.
- Style-leveraging personal strengths and overcoming limitations in order to develop a winning style.
- Decisive actions-however uncomfortable, and in spite of personal insecurities, in order to reach for the extraordinary.
- Compassion-for one's self as he or she experiments with new behaviors, experiences setbacks-and for others as they do the same.
- Humor-committing to not take one's self so seriously, using humor to lighten and brighten any situation.
- Personal control-maintaining composure in the face of disappointment and unmet expectations, avoiding emotional reactivity.
- Courage-to reach for more than before, to shift out of being fear based in to being in abundance as a core strategy for success, to engage in continual self examination, to overcome internal and external obstacles.

### **How can the success of the coaching process be measured?**

Measurement may be thought of in two distinct ways. First, there are the external indicators of performance: measures which can be seen and measured in the individual's or team's environment. Second, there are internal indicators of success: measures which are inherent within the individual or team members being coached and can be measured by the individual or team being coached with the support of the coach. Ideally, both external and internal metrics are incorporated.

Examples of external measures include achievement of coaching goals established at the outset of the coaching relationship, increased income/revenue, obtaining a promotion, performance feedback which is obtained from a sample of the individual's constituents (e.g., direct reports, colleagues, customers, boss, the manager him/herself), personal and/or business performance data (e.g., productivity, efficiency measures). The external measures selected should ideally be things the individual is already measuring and are things the individual has some ability to directly influence.

Examples of internal measures include self-scoring/self-validating assessments that can be administered initially and at regular intervals in the coaching process, changes in the individual's self-awareness and awareness of others, shifts in thinking which inform more effective actions, and shifts in one's emotional state which inspire confidence.

### **What are the factors that should be considered when looking at the financial investment in coaching?**

Working with a coach requires both a personal commitment of time and energy as well as a financial commitment. Fees charged vary by specialty and by the level of experience of the coach. Individuals should consider both the desired benefits as well as the anticipated length of time to be spent in coaching. Since the coaching relationship is predicated on clear communication, any financial concerns or questions should be voiced in initial conversations before the agreement is made. The ICF Coach Referral Service allows you to search for a coach based on a number of qualifications including fee range.

