



Coaching and Psychotherapy

by Dr. Edward A. Dreyfus, Ph.D.

More and more people are hearing the terms personal coach or life coach. There have been newspaper articles and professional articles written on the subject. Several people have asked me, "what is a life or personal coach and how is personal coaching different from psychotherapy?" Until recently, personal coaching has been confined to corporations where it is known as executive coaching or executive consulting. Today personal coaching has found its way into the public domain. This issue of the Psychotherapy Update will discuss personal or life coaching as a new trend that will become more available over the next decade to assist people in achieving a more fulfilling, rewarding and balanced life. Perhaps personal coaching is just what you've been waiting for to help you enrich your already satisfying life.

Coaching has been around for a long time. It is usually associated with sports, e.g., tennis coach, golf coach, track coach, football coach or baseball coach, to name a few. You want to get better at something, whom do you call? A coach. You want to become more physically fit, you call a personal trainer. Just as there are athletic coaches, voice coaches, and acting coaches, there are personal coaches. Personal coaches, sometime referred to as life coaches, are usually professionally trained mental health practitioners, who, in most instances, have been successful in their professional and personal life. In addition to their professional training, they have developed special skills in helping individuals develop their potential and fulfill their goals. Within the past years the practice of personal coaching has mushroomed. In 1994 it was estimated that there were approximately 1000 personal or life coaches nationwide. Today it is estimated that there are close to 5000. As people seek to achieve greater fulfillment from their work, their marriages, and their life in general, the need for personal coaches will continue to increase. Previously many people sought psychotherapy for personal growth not just for treatment of emotional problems or mental illness. Others wanted some other form of assistance without the association to mental illness carried by psychotherapy. Now people can turn to personal coaches whose focus is on growth and development of all areas of one's life rather than on internal stress and emotional conflict.

Coaching and Mentoring

Mentoring has been around for as long as there have been relationships. Mentor was the name of the royal advisor to Odysseus in Homer's Odyssey. A mentor is a trusted person to whom we turn for counsel, advice, and support who may act as a guide or consultant suggesting a path or course of action.

Many of us may have been fortunate to have in our lives an important person to whom we would turn for advice and counsel. This person may have been a revered uncle, a respected teacher, a member of the clergy, or our Scoutmaster. We often refer to these individuals as mentors. We look to them for assistance in helping us fulfill a part of ourselves. We want to develop a better self, whether that self is in relation to our school, work, business, or profession; or we want to develop more effective skills in organizing our life. These mentors may assist us in fulfilling our dreams and aspirations, and may become role models as well.



Coaching and Psychotherapy

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Coaching and mentoring have a great deal in common. A personal coach is similar to a professional mentor. The coach's role is more clearly defined. The coach has no other relationship to the client than that of a coach. Therefore, there is no hidden agenda or conflict of interest. Often we seek a coach to help us achieve balance in our lives. Personal coaches believe that when all aspects of one's life are in harmony, a synergy is formed that can propel an individual forward to achieve greatness.

When we turn to a personal coach, we want to become better at whatever it is that we are focused on. We want to actualize our potential. We know that we have the potential, we know that our business can grow or that our life can be better balanced, but we have difficulty in developing a plan of action that will help us reach our vision of the way things could be. Something is blocking us or we are too close to the project. We need a second pair of eyes. We need a boost. Professional coaches start with where you are. They work with you, as a collaborator, to help you realize your goals. Frequently they help you define and clarify your goals. Once your goals have been articulated, they then work with you to develop a plan of action for achieving those goals.

Coaching and Consulting

Consulting is a much more recent development. Industrial consulting developed after WWII followed by executive consulting and continued to evolve with the development of the human potentials movement in the 1970's. Business schools and schools of management incorporated executive consulting into their programs. Executive consultants assisted top level managers in developing training programs, human resources, management skills, and organizational development.

Coaching is related to consulting; some consider coaching a subset of consulting. However, the consultant normally provides the consultation service for the period of the contract; once the consultant has completed the project, the relationship terminates. In personal coaching, the coach not only helps the client develop a plan of action to achieve a desired set of goals, the coach also stays with the client to help implement the changes and goals.

With a consultant you pay for an expert's advice and opinion. A coach will help you explore options. A personal coach will assist you in discovering alternatives that fit your agenda, rather than tell what to do. A coach will empower you to find the answers to your questions and develop a strategy for your life that is consistent with your values and beliefs. Generally speaking, coaching goes beyond consulting to incorporate all areas of your life rather than the narrower focus commonly found in consulting.



Coaching and Psychotherapy

What is the difference between coaching and psychotherapy? Coaching is not therapy. Personal coaches don't work on "issues" or delve into the past. Nor do they deal much with understanding human behavior. Coaches do not focus on resolving past traumas that affect personality development nor do they try to change personality structures. Coaches do not attempt to ameliorate psychic pain, anxiety, depression, or sexual dysfunction. These are issues that are dealt with in psychotherapy.

A personal coach focuses on:

- Helping people set better goals.
- Asking their clients to do more than they would on their own.
- Helping their clients to focus better so as to produce results more quickly.
- Providing clients with the tools, support, and structure to accomplish more.

Whereas psychotherapy focuses on the past and the present, coaching focuses on the present and future. The personal coach maintains a focus on the goals that the client decides s/he would like to achieve. The collaborative effort propels the individual to continually move toward the goal. In psychotherapy the assumption is that there is something wrong that gets in the way of a person's functioning that needs fixing. In coaching the assumption is that there is nothing wrong with the client, but the client wants an even better life. In psychotherapy the main focus is on the client's internal world. In coaching the focus is on the client's entire life including health, relationships, career, spirituality, etc., and how it all fits together.

Personal coaches help people develop a balanced life. They do this through strengthening their client's personal foundation. Part of one's personal foundation is recognizing and clarifying one's core values. Most of us seldom take the time to delineate and clarify our values, those beliefs that are at the center of our belief. Often we act in ways that are contrary to our internalized values and we end up feeling uncomfortable, guilty, or even ashamed. Frequently, we are not aware of the causes for our disquietude. On exploration we may find that we are acting in ways that are contrary to our own value system. A coach can help you explore your values and assist in developing a set of goals and actions that comport with this value system such that you feel in synch with yourself.

Coaches have no agenda but that of their clients. It is one of the few relationships where the client's agenda is the only agenda that matters. Personal coaches want to assist you in actualizing your agenda on your terms. The objective of the coach is to open new possibilities. The attention in coaching is solely on you and your agenda.



How Does Coaching Work?

Similar to psychotherapy, coaching works best when there are regular appointments. In order to maintain focus and honor commitments, continuity is necessary. However, coaching is not limited to face-to-face meetings. In fact, most personal coaching takes place over the telephone. Coaching is not limited to geographical location. One can be coached from any location. Coaching sessions are usually thirty minutes in length with three or four sessions scheduled per month.

1. There are many variables that contribute to the effectiveness of coaching:
2. Better goals are set, ones that naturally impel you forward.
3. Synergy between the coach and client creates momentum.
4. Accountability. Knowing that you have to report to someone on progress or completion of an assignment, impels you to completion.
5. Time limits and deadlines may set which mitigates procrastination.
6. Prioritizing tasks with your coach makes it more likely that the tasks will be accomplished.
7. Tasks are put into manageable pieces to avoid feeling overwhelmed with the enormity of the task.
8. You can borrow your coaches belief in you, until you develop a belief in yourself.
9. You have a partner in your coach; working with someone always feels more empowering than working alone.
10. You develop new skills.
11. When you have a coach, you tend to take yourself more seriously.
12. You take more effective and focused actions immediately.
13. You stop putting up with what is holding you back.
14. You set better goals that are more in accord with what you want out of life.

Why is coaching becoming so popular?

Thomas Leonard, founder of Coach University, says that coaching is becoming so popular for several reasons:

"Many people are tired of doing what they think they "should" do and are ready to do something special and meaningful for the rest of their lives. One problem is that many can't see what this is or, if they can, they can't find a way to reorient their life around it. A coach can help them do both.

People are realizing how simple it can be to accomplish something that several years ago might have felt out of reach or like a pipedream. A coach is not a miracle worker but a coach does have a large tool kit to help the Big Idea become a Reality. Fortunately, people now have the time and resources to invest in themselves in this kind of growth.



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Spirituality. If you track the phenomenal success of James Redfield's *Celestine Prophecy* on the NY Times best-seller list back in 1994, you got a sense of just how many people are willing to look at, and consider, the notion of spirituality. Wow. Many coaches are spiritually based - even the ones who coach IBM or AT&T. America is growing more spiritual very quickly. ([My] working definition of spirituality? How connected you are with yourself and others.") The coach helps the clients to tune in better to themselves and to others."

How can I know whether I need a coach or a therapist?

Generally people have turned to a psychotherapist when they experience psychological pain that interferes with the conduct of their everyday life. They may experience anxiety, depression, sexual dysfunction, dysphoria, low self-esteem, lack of identity, obsessions, compulsive rituals, or a feeling that they are not functioning to capacity. Many people have turned to psychologists and other psychotherapists when they want to enhance their life. They seek therapy for personal growth and greater self-understanding.

Coaching begins where psychotherapy leaves off. The coach assumes that the client is well-functioning and is facing a roadblock or finding it difficult to get over the next mountain to greater fulfillment. People turn to coaches when their life is going well. Usually they are high-functioning people who want to expand their lives, their businesses, and their general outlook. They tend to be successful people who have a vision that they could go beyond where they are, but feel that they would like someone to work with them to achieve their goals. These are the same people who would seek a coach to improve their golf or tennis game, seek consultation in their business, or utilize a financial planner to assist with their finances. They seek a coach to accelerate their growth or maximize an opportunity. Some people choose a coach to help in the short-term for a specific task or project, while others engage a coach to restructure their life.

What training do coaches have?

Many coaches have a background in human behavior, psychology, or human development. A large number of coaches hold licenses in a psychological discipline, e.g., psychology, counseling, social work, etc. Others have a background in business, law or consulting. These individuals usually have sought additional training in coaching. Most all coaches have had extensive personal experience.

Many coaches, like myself, have found that coaching emerged naturally out of their clinical practice. After having been in practice for over 30 years, I have developed a body of experience. I have worked with individuals for years and watched them through their various life transitions. Many times people come back after being in therapy seeking something different from their therapy experience. They are facing an obstacle to their progress and wanted a trusted professional with whom to discuss their situation.



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Whether it is a business decision, a life decision, or a wish to change their lifestyle, they want a different perspective. So they have turned to me. Over the years I have found this type of relationship very rewarding. Often these people would jokingly refer to me as "Coach." Little did I know that this title was to be prophetic. I am sure that many practitioners have found their way into coaching by a similar route.

People choose their coach on the basis of whether there is reason to believe that this person can help me to accomplish my goals. If they feel comfortable with their coach and believe progress is being made, they continue. Otherwise, they terminate the relationship. Coaching is not about "the doctor knows best" model. It is about what works for you.

About the Author:

Dr. Edward A. Dreyfus is in private practice in Santa Monica, California where he practices as a clinical psychologist, divorce mediator and life coach. He offers individual and group psychotherapy as well as couples therapy and sex therapy. In his coaching practice he works with individuals seeking to enhance and balance their professional, career and personal life.

Dr. Dreyfus is a Licensed Psychologist and a Licensed Marriage, Family, & Child Therapist. He is also a Certified Sex Therapist of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists. He is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, a Diplomate and Fellow of the American Board of Sexology, a Fellow of the Academy of Clinical Sexologists, a Diplomate in Professional Psychotherapy of the International Academy of Behavioral Medicine, Counseling, and Psychotherapy, Inc., and a Diplomate of the American College of Forensic Examiners. Dr. Dreyfus is a Registrant in the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology and is a Registrant in the National Register of Certified Group Psychotherapists.

In 1996, he was the recipient of the prestigious Distinguished Psychologist Award given by the Los Angeles County Psychological Association. Dr. Dreyfus has written three books, several book chapters, over two dozen professional articles, and has presented at many professional meetings.

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“It” depletes me, I get my fuel from successful
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