

What is coaching?

Coaching as defined by the ICF is

“partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”

This definition is very broad, so let’s simplify it by breaking it down.

Coaching is **both** a program and a process.

As a program, coaching is used as a method of directing, instructing, and training individuals or groups with the aim to develop skills or achieve a specific goal. For example, motivational speaking is a form of directing, while seminars, workshops, and supervised exercises fall under training and instruction (1).

As a process, coaching is used to help the client to achieve a desired outcome or goal. For example, a coach listens to the client’s problems or concerns, and then provides coaching through which the client determines what steps to take to overcome his or her problem (1).

Coaches do not give advice, nor do they offer therapy. Coaches simply act as a catalyst, *i.e.*, change agent, to help clients achieve desired outcomes or goals (1).

This does not mean that the client could not work out their own problems. On the contrary, coaches see the client as the expert – the master of his or her life – and believe that every client is creative, resourceful, and whole (1).

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However, everyone has some limitations that directly or indirectly affect different areas in their life, or a narrow perspective in how they look at situations in their life and business (1).

These limitations or weaknesses, whether mental, emotional or psychological, cause people to get stuck in personal, family, and business transitions. Further, during potentially life-altering transitions, people often feel overwhelmed, exhausted and out of balance with their sense of how life was before they entered the transition. Coaches help their clients to get through these transitions by making the “right” moves, which they are not able to make on their own (1).

In summary, coaches help their clients to:

- Discover, clarify, and achieve the goals the client wants to achieve,
- Encourage client self-discovery,
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies, and
- Hold the client responsible and accountable for their actions.

Coaching is not therapy

The major difference between coaching and therapy is that with coaching the focus is on the present and future rather than the past, more on goals and behaviors than emotions and emotional patterns. There is also more of an equal balance of power, hence the term co-creative relationship, between the coach and client than between the typical therapist and client (1).

Coaching is not consulting

Even so consultants often employ coaching principles during certain phases of the consulting projects; consultants come up with the solutions and tell the client what to do - a passive approach. Coaching, on the other hand, is a process where the coach helps the client to come up with the solutions that moves him/her forward toward the desired goal. It is this co-relationship, an active approach, that makes coaching such a powerful and useful tool (1).