

Coaching and Counselling: What is the Connection?

By Sharon Brain, MA, RCC and Juliet Austin, MA, Professional Coach and Director of the Canadian Office of the Institute for Life Coach Training (ILCT), Contributing Writers

Coaching came into its own in the 80's, fed by the human potential movement, counseling and therapy, business and organizational consulting. As change became the norm rather than an exception in corporations, coaching provided one option to guide outsized, downsized, or self-maximizing employees.

Over the past ten years, coaching has spread beyond the business world. People from all walks of life are now hiring coaches to assist them in achieving a variety of personal and professional goals. The growth in coaching is evidenced by the increasing numbers of coaches joining the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the professional association that sets ethics and standards for the coaching profession and certifies coaches.

According to the ICF, coaching can be defined as “an ongoing partnership that helps clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their

performance, and enhance their quality of life.”

The name “coaching” uses a metaphor from the sports community, where coaching is an established activity. No team of athletes would consider trying to reach excellence without a coach. In being coached, one does not have to admit either to needing help or even to having a problem, so the shame-based feelings often triggered by counselling are by-passed. It is no disgrace to have a coach, when even Tiger Woods has had several!

Some of the people who popularized coaching were business men like Thomas Leonard, who launched the financially remunerative Coach U, women like Cheryl Richard, from her position as Oprah's coach and writer of two very successful books, Frederick Hudson of the Hudson Institute, an academic, and Mary Beth O'Neill, from the Leadership Institute of Seattle, an organizational development consultant.

Counsellors and therapists were not in the vanguard of the coaching movement. However, as coaching

becomes more popular and more counsellors discover it, more counsellors are found in various coach-training programs, and are either including coaching as one of the services they offer or transitioning from a counselling practice to a coaching practice.

How is Coaching Different from Therapy?

One of the basic questions counsellors wrestle with as they think about coaching is, “How is it different from what I already do”? One of the difficulties in answering such a question is therapists do widely different things. (So do coaches, of course.)

If one compares coaching to psychodynamic models, for example, one might say that therapy focuses on issues of pathology, healing and unresolved psychological issues of the past. Coaching on the other hand, begins with the present and assists clients in setting very clear, and specific goals that they want to achieve in the future. While the past may be discussed on occasion, it is addressed only in the context

of discovering what is blocking the client from moving forward. The focus is always on movement and taking action, not on insight or understanding.

Counsellors from the Solution Focused or more systemic end of the therapy spectrum often say that they already focus on the present and future as well and do not see coaching as very different from what they do. However, the words, “*solution focused therapy*” may still imply that there is a problem for which a solution needs to be sought. In coaching a client may be seeking solutions, but they are more often seeking to enhance their performance (and sometimes reach excellence) in a given area of their life.

In addition, the word “therapy” conjures up the notion that someone is in need of help or a cure. Coaching clients choose to work with a coach because they *want* to, not because they *need* to.

Another difference is that coaches, as contrasted to counsellors, are not seen as experts. Rather, they are seen more as a person with a set of skills they use to support people to achieve goals. A coach can be seen more like a partner or buddy that you check in with from week to week to review your progress, vision for the future and set new goals.

In an article entitled, *Coaching Vs. Therapy: a Perspective*, Hart, Battner and Leipsic asked coaches who were trained both as therapists and as coaches to report on the critical difference they saw between coaching and therapy.

Their answers varied, but one important difference reported was in the relationship. They reported themselves as more “self-revelatory,” as “having a skilled friendship”, and as being “in partnership.” The boundaries are looser, transference issues are not addressed and they use more humour, are more actively engaged.

“You can admit you know them in the grocery store,” one respondent said. Also, they “expect more” from their coaching clients. One counsellor reported that “coaching is not such a tender zone as therapy was.”

They also reported that there was far more flexibility in the delivery of coaching. Subjects interviewed reported coaching clients using telephone sessions, e-mail, and personal meetings over lunch or even on the golf course. Some sessions were an hour, some five minutes.

Nuts and Bolts: How Coaching Works

Coaching usually happens over the phone, although it can also occur in person.

Therapists often find it difficult to imagine that they could coach without being face to face with their clients. Coaches—and their clients--usually do not find this a difficulty. To the contrary, it can be an advantage as it is more convenient for both client and coach, does not involve travel time or costs, offers clients more anonymity, and encourages coaches to develop exceptional listening skills.

Coaching fees range from \$200-500 per month for 3-4, 30 minute individual sessions. Usually included in this fee is additional e-mail and brief telephone calls on an as-needed basis. Fees are usually higher for in-person coaching and/or longer sessions. Fees for corporate coaching can be as much as \$1000 + a month. Fees for group telephone meetings can range from \$100-\$150 or more per month for two or three 1-hour sessions.

The Coaching Process

When a client first contracts with a coach, they are usually sent an intake package electronically that includes a contract to be signed, several forms (e.g. questions about life goals and plans) and (sometimes) assessments and tests to be completed (perhaps assessing values, behaviors, personality styles, etc.) Clients often send

their coach a weekly prep form prior to each session which focuses on accomplishments in the previous week, challenges they are currently experiencing and what they want to accomplish with their coach in the upcoming session.

During the coaching call, the coach will ask what the client wants, listen to the answer and ask questions that assist clients to clarify, envision what they want, address limits or blocks, identify gaps, and help them move towards taking action. Typically by the end of the session, the coach will want to know three things from the client:

- What will the client do over the next week?
- When will s/he do it by?
- How will the client know s/he has been successful and how will the coach know the client has been successful at achieving his or her goal(s).

Future Directions

As the coaching profession continues to evolve, several trends are likely to become more obvious:

1. For the consumer, the availability of coaches will mean a change in the way some people seek support,

especially those clients outside EAPs and agencies.

2. Some of the distinctions between therapy and coaching will be made more explicit and will be becoming clearer to the public. People will know when they want to seek therapy or coaching. Some US regulatory boards (e.g. Colorado) that license therapists have suggested that coaching fits under their definition of therapy. This could cause problems for coaches who are not licensed therapists in those states. Organizations like the ICF and many therapists who are now coaches are addressing these issues, attempting to sort them out.

3. An increasing number of therapists will receive coach training and offer coaching services instead of, or in addition to, their therapy services.

4. Training programs for coaching will increasingly be developed in academe. The University of Sidney in Australia is developing a Coaching Psychology program.

5. More sophisticated models of coaching will continue to emerge incorporating theories and concepts from psychology and therapy.

6. Coaches perhaps will be required to have training in assessment for depression, suicide, abuse, and even grief counselling so they know

both when to appropriately refer clients for therapy and what to do in order to avoid risking lawsuits.

7. Therapists are likely to refer to coaches more often once their clients reach a place where they are ready to take more action or achieve excellence in their lives. Coaches will increasingly refer a client to therapy when the client seems inappropriate for coaching or gets stuck on an issue that is not being resolved in coaching.

Resources

Books

Co-Active Coaching (1998). Laura Whitworth, Henry Kimsey House and Phil Sandahl. Davies-Black Publishing.

Handbook of Coaching, The (1999). Frederick Hudson. Jossey-Bass.

How To Become a Coach: A Guide for Counsellors and Therapists. Juliet Austin & Sue Bond.

Articles

A Week in the Life. A Burnt-out Therapist Becomes a Successful Coach. Patrick Williams. *Psychotherapy Networker*, May/June, 2001

Coaching versus Therapy: A Perspective. *Consulting Psychology* (In press). Vicki Hart, John Blattner & Staci Leipsic

Websites

The Institute for Life Coach Training (ILCT).

www.lifecoachtraining.com

Coachville

www.thomasleonard.com/coachville/default.lasso?id=242259

The International Coaching Federation (ICF).

www.coachfederation.org

The Vancouver Chapter of the International Coaching Federation

www.vancouvericf.org

Bios of Authors

Juliet Austin, MA, Counselling Psychology, is a professional coach who assists counsellors and therapists in building therapy and/or coaching practices and conducts seminars and trainings for helping professionals transitioning to coaching. She has trained with both Coach U and The Institute for Life Coach Training (ILCT). Juliet is also the Director for the Canadian Office of ILCT and co-author, with Sue Bond, of an ebook entitled, *How to Become A Coach: A Guide for Counsellors and Therapists*. It can be purchased at:

<http://www.how-to-become-a-coach.com/therapist/main.htm>

Juliet can be reached at 604.730.1838 or coach@julietastin.com

Sharon Brain is a Registered Clinical Counsellor who trained in Family Systems. She is a Life Skills Coach Trainer and EMDR and has a private practice in North Vancouver. She works with groups of health care workers suffering from moral distress and secondary trauma. She can be reached at sharonbrain@canadawired.com or 604-924-2417.