



BY DAVID COHEN  
For Workplace News

In professional sports, when things go wrong, the coach gets fired. In business, when things go wrong, a coach gets hired!

CNBC called professional or executive coaching a “growth industry” for the late 1990s and early 2000s. No kidding. A quick search on the Internet reveals 1,165 hits for sites about coaches or coaching services.

One of my favorites is a link to a group of retired military pilots. What they lack in professional training or actual experience they make up for in flight suits and dog tags — all part of their sales gimmick. Another site offers to help build your coaching practice with weekly tips. After 125 hours of long distance supervised coaching (plus a fee) you become a member of the international Coaching Federation (IFC).

The IFC is just one major professional association serving today’s growing coach industry, a place where “coaches inform others that they are part of an influential voice that is shaping the future of coaching around the globe.” Invest the fee, attend the program and you too can be certified and accredited — Licensed to coach.

All this promotion and accreditation fails to address how

## Licensed to coach

and when coaches should be selected, and what makes coaching a worthwhile investment. While coaching can provide valuable help to a valued employee, the danger exists that it ends up being an impersonal, non-specific activity — snake oil sales for modern business.

Is it necessary for your coach to have a doctoral degree in education or industrial counseling, for instance? Should he or she be a successful business leader who now wants to help others? Should they be a trained fighter pilot? Should they be a member of a professional federation? Given the variety of options, it’s not easy to know what’s important.

In talking with the coaches I know who are highly valued by their clients, a guideline of general considerations quickly became apparent. Call them the three Rs.

**Referral:** The best coaches seem to be found through word of mouth. If you’re looking for a good coach, ask other leaders or managers about their experiences and who they would recommend. Otherwise, you’re taking a big chance. Accreditation on its own is too loose a standard; colorful life experience just makes for good story telling; and business success doesn’t automatically translate into coaching success. There are many great coaches that never tan successful world- class firms — and many world- class business leaders you would never want as a coach.

**Relationship:** Change isn’t easy. A coach needs to develop trust, personal connection and openness with a client w help them change their behaviour and hold them accountable for reaching development goals. That means at least some one-on-one time plus follow up — a real relationship.

**Results:** Speaking of goals. Why has a coach been hired in the first place? When targets or issues are specific, responsibilities become clear and the probability of success is enhanced. Behaviour change and development needs to be in line with business needs.

Results should be measurable.

A specific time line needs to be in place. Coaching does not mean coaching for life. It’s about helping you change for business success. If the benefit of that coaching extends into your personal life so much the better, but that should riot be a requirement. Good coaching culminates in the employee’s ability to learn to identify their own issues going forward. Ultimately, the employee should develop the capability to adjust their behaviour and succeed on their own, without the help of a second party.

Here are nine more key points for finding the right coach. Your coach should:

- Be recommended to you by someone who shares your work values

- Understand your environment, even if they've never done your specific job or participated in your industry;
- Be someone you've met and feel comfortable with — not someone forced on you;
- Confirm your development goals after holding information gathering activities with key people in your work;
- Establish lines of communications with anyone in your company involved in your development without ceding control or undue influence to them;
- Be available to you for a defined number of sessions — not for life;
- Be open to mutual evaluation at any stage to determine if it is right to continue the process;
- Not impose any development plan on you unless the coaching goal is to alter unacceptable behavior such as sexual harassment or as a last effort to avoid dismissal; and
- Be someone you trust to keep the process confidential and focused on your needs.

Follow these guidelines and you'll find a good coach.

In next month's article we're going to go deeper into coaching to determine when coaching is most valuable, who's a good candidate for coaching, and what coaching needs to accomplish to be a good use of everyone's time and money.

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