

How to Get Coached

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People hook up with life coaches in sometimes strange and serendipitous ways. Once, says June Bond, a coach and therapist in Baltimore, someone was given her services as a Valentine's Day gift. Another client "won" her in an auction at a fundraiser. Others have had chance meetings with coaches on airplanes and at conferences.

- **Personal referrals** are best, but even if you're not starting out cold, you'll want to **shop around**, advises Judy Feld, the Dallas-based president of the International Coach Federation (ICF).

- Start by **compiling a list of names**, either from friends and colleagues or by going to the **ICF Web site** (www.coachfederation.org). You can search its registry based on the issues you want to address. (Do you have personal or business concerns? Are you a new mother home with a baby?) This free referral service can identify coaches based on their background, training or level of ICF certification. You can also search for free at **CoachVille** (www.coachville.com), a network of 33,000 coaches from around the world. If you're looking specifically for a coach who has training as a mental health professional, try MentorCoach, which is based in Bethesda. (www.mentorcoach.com).

- Once you've got names of coaches, **interview them**. Reputable coaches will give you a complimentary session, probably via phone, so you can size each other up. You'll want to ask about the coach's educational background, career stops, years coaching, training or certification, motivation for becoming a coach and what he or she can do for you. Find out about **fees**, whether you must **sign a contract**, and whether you must **commit for a period of time**. Most coaches say they need at least three months to accomplish anything. Most important, gauge your comfort level and your instincts. People who report successful experiences with coaches cite the chemistry as key to the experience.

- After selecting a coach, expect to do a lot of **preparation**. Your coach should take you through some kind of **needs assessment** before starting on actual coaching. Linda Finkle, a coach who works from the Washington area, relies on widely used surveys by Coach U, the training program from which she graduated. In one exercise, clients are asked to identify their true values in life and then to narrow them to the most important four. In another exercise, "The Wheel of Life," clients are asked to rank their satisfaction with various areas of life such as health, personal growth, money and romance.

- Between sessions there are **homework assignments**. These are usually projects that move you closer to your goal. For Ann Cochran, who hired a coach to help her make the transition from corporate communications work to travel writing, the most difficult work was done at the beginning of her four-month coaching experience.

"I decided what I wanted to change, and then **we developed specific criteria for how I would go about getting new work**," she says. This could be as simple as a "required" trip to a magazine stand to study publications she wanted to target, to a promise to write and send letters to editors pitching her story ideas. Sometimes she waited until the last minute before her coaching session to do them. "I couldn't wiggle out of something we agreed to do. She was no-nonsense," Cochran says of her coach. "And for me, I thought, well, why am I going to pay her if I'm not doing the things she wants me to do?"

- Each session should work toward shifting how it is that you look at yourself, no matter what goals you're working on, and giving you practical tools and feedback to move you closer to achieving them. "It is not easy work," says Marti Campbell, a coach in Chevy Chase. "The coach can support you and help

you stretch. But the onus and work falls onto the coachee and how dedicated you are to reaching your goal."

If that's the case, why do you need a coach?

"If you could do it yourself," says Campbell, "it would have already happened."

-- **Cecilia Capuzzi Simon**

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