

A man and a woman in business attire are standing in a modern office, looking at a document together. The man is holding the document and a folder, while the woman is holding a coffee cup. They are both smiling and appear to be in a collaborative meeting. The background shows large windows and a bright, airy office environment.

# How To Choose a Coach Wisely

# HOW TO CHOOSE A COACH WISELY

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If you're looking to engage a personal coach, the challenge may seem rather daunting. A simple internet search can quickly identify dozens to choose from. How do you make a wise decision?

I've created this booklet to highlight basic considerations to keep mind as you work through the decision to engage a coach. This is not a sales pitch for my services. Rather, it's an overview of factors which should shape your decision.

## **Varieties of Coaching**

First, you should know that coaching comes in a great many stripes. The type of coach you choose should depend on the issues with which you want help.

For instance, if you're looking specifically for an executive coach, a leadership coach, or a business coach, your needs are beyond the scope of what the majority of coaches address.

About 60% of the people who call themselves coaches primarily provide guidance on such things as career decisions, personal goal-setting, lifestyle pursuits, and self-improvement. Given their focus on personal issues, these coaches are generally known as "life coaches."

A much smaller number of coaches work specifically with the challenges related to executive, managerial, and

business life. Dependent on their primary focus, these coaches go by a number of names. Some call themselves executive coaches. Others refer to themselves as business coaches or leadership coaches.

SLDI's LeaderPerfect coaching service spans all three of these specialties. But other reputable coaching firms restrict themselves to only one of them.

### **Evolution of the Coaching Industry**

Coaching in general – and executive coaching in particular – is a relatively young profession. In the late 1990s, when I was laying the foundation for what would become my LeaderPerfect coaching program, personal coaches of all types numbered only 3000 or so worldwide.

Today that number exceeds 50,000, with upwards of 20,000 coaches in the United States alone. Globally speaking, coaching is a billion-dollar industry.

Such rapid expansion in a condensed period of time means that thousands of coaches are still somewhat new to the profession. At best, they have a few years of experience.

The profession is so young, indeed, that only a handful of us have been at it for more than 20 years. I count myself fortunate to be among those few and to have coached over 700 executives and managers during my coaching career.

You therefore want to take professional experience into account in choosing a coach. How important is that experience for you? Only you can decide. There are outstanding coaches with only a limited track record as a coach. On the other hand, a longer track record usually makes a coach more resourceful in helping you achieve your coaching goals.

## Coaching Credentials

Second, you should be aware that the coaching profession is not regulated. Unlike fields such as counseling, therapy, and social work, coaches in the U.S. are not licensed by state governments. Regulators treat coaches somewhat like consultants, who are not subject to government-mandated licensing requirements or educational minimums.

As a consequence, anyone can proclaim himself or herself a coach, print some business cards, and set up shop for coaching. It is therefore vital to check the credentials and qualifications of anyone whom you consider as a coach.

Coaching credentials fall into two basic categories: training and experience. Worldwide over 500 institutes have sprung up offering training which leads to a coaching certificate. These institutes vary widely in quality, from those with rigorous programs to a few who offer certificates for little more than payment of a fee.

The majority of these institutes focus primarily on credentialing life coaches. The programs which do a thorough job of training executive and business coaches are a much smaller number.

Because these institutes vary so much in quality, you should never presume that someone is well-trained simply because he or she has a coaching certificate. A consortium called the International Coaching Federation (or ICF) has emerged to set training and accrediting standards for certification in all coaching fields.

If you are considering a coach with an ICF-approved certificate, you are reasonably assured that the person's training was substantial and professional.

In addition, numerous colleges and universities now include coaching certificates in their continuing education departments. Some even provide graduate degrees in coaching or offer coaching as a concentration in their MBA programs.

### **The Life Experience of a Coach**

To join the coaching profession, however, formal training is not required. Many business and executive coaches enter the field of coaching solely on the basis of broad expertise developed over lengthy and successful executive careers.

From its outset twenty years ago, my firm (SLDI) has been built around men and women who, for the most part, came into coaching along this very path. In doing so, we were not rejecting the value of coaching certifications. Rather, our approach was a carefully-chosen element of SLDI's business strategy.

Because our goal was to coach very senior executives in large corporations, we wanted to pair them with coaches who had walked in their shoes – coaches who themselves had years of firsthand experience in demanding leadership or management posts.

This background helped our coaches establish immediate credibility with prospective clients. Therefore, we found it more important for our coaches to have lengthy experience in leadership or management than to have certification.

In life-coaching, you determine the credibility of a coach on a similar basis. If you're looking for a life coach, you probably want someone with extensive life-experience – enough so that the person is endowed with notable wisdom with regard to life issues such as yours. You want a person with good coaching skills, of course. Beyond that

consideration, however, you're likely indifferent to whether your coach gained life expertise through experience or through training.

Again, my purpose in these remarks is not to downplay the value of coach certification. I simply want you to be cognizant that exceptional coaches do not necessarily have ICF-endorsed credentials.

### **Offerings which Coaches Provide**

Finally, don't hesitate to take a prospective coach on a "test drive," so to speak. Most coaches offer a free initial coaching session. This allows you to judge how well your two personalities are a good fit. Deep rapport between a coach and a client is one of the most pivotal factors in determining whether coaching engagements prove successful.

You should also use this "test drive" to learn more about the coach's methodology. Some coaches build their engagements around a set program which they follow religiously with every client. These programs are usually well thought-out and have been thoroughly field-tested. They can thus be beneficial. And the coach can usually tell you up front how long the engagement will run.

Other coaches completely customize a coaching engagement to the specific needs, priorities, and interests of a client. Because this type of engagement is so flexible, its length is not always predictable.

For one thing, the client's needs and priorities may change over the course of the engagement, which may then change the scope of the assistance sought from the coach.

For over 20 years, SLDI has used this more flexible, customizable approach to coaching. Over that period, our typical engagement has lasted from six to nine months. But some which have lasted as long as two years or more. \*We do offer fixed-term, fixed-fee coaching programs for those who prefer one.)

You might be concerned, however, about making something of an open-ended commitment to a coach. What if you don't see the results which you want from work with the coach.

Don't worry. A truly professional coach will allow you to discontinue an engagement if you discover that the engagement is not working for you. One benefit of having so many qualified coaches today is that you have options. You don't need to settle for a coach who is not meeting your needs.

### **The Coaching Venue**

In the last few years an additional consideration has become part of choosing a coach, namely, the venue in which the coaching will be delivered. When I began coaching, about 95% of all coaching engagements were delivered in face-to-face conversations. Coaching by phone constituted the balance.

Even then, a few coaches provided their services only by phone or, in the case of a still smaller number, by email. With the advent of Skype, Zoom, and other virtual conferencing tools, these media became popular as coaching vehicles.

A significant portion of today's coaches provide their services exclusively, or in large part, by video conferencing. Others prefer to retain the practice of

coaching in person, with occasional video sessions when face-to-face meetings become impractical – something which happened frequently during the COVID lockdowns.

In-person coaching has notable benefits, and in my judgment is usually the most effective mode of delivery. It has two major drawbacks.

One is the commute time required to support the engagement. And second, if the coach is the one who is making the commute, the fee for coaching is normally higher. The lower commuting requirements and fee structure are primary reasons that virtual coaching has grown in popularity.

Moreover, since a coach can schedule multiple virtual sessions back-to-back, a person who does only virtual coaching is able to manage a larger number of clients.

### **Final Thoughts**

I hope this brief presentation has armed you with greater knowledge and confidence in selecting the right coach for you. I would close with one other caveat. The word “coach” has become very popular in recent years. And since the coaching industry is not regulated, anyone is free to call himself or herself a coach.

Thus, many people who are in fact sales people label themselves as coaches. Their ultimate objective is not to coach you, but to persuade you to buy some service or product. This is particularly common with people who bill themselves as personal finance coaches, health and fitness coaches, or small business coaches.

Therefore, don't take a person's self-description as a coach at face value. Check out their website. Check out their



Google reviews. Do your homework to determine that the service which you are procuring is indeed the type of coaching which would benefit you most.

For more on my LeaderPerfect coaching services go to

<https://www.LeaderPerfect.com>