

D O YOU NEED A THERAPIST OR A COACH?

At one time or another in the life cycle, many people need professional help of some kind. Chief executives and senior level business leaders were the first to seek counsel from personal coaches. The coaching industry began in the 1980s when financial planners realized their clients needed more than traditional tax and investment advice. These clients didn't have emotional problems that required therapy; they just wanted to brainstorm about broader life and career issues. The needs of executives working in the corporate climate of the '80s led to the birth of the "life planning" industry of personal coaching. Since then, the coaching field has grown with a number of specialty niches—executive coaching, career coaching, personal coaching, spiritual coaching etc.

Change in corporate loyalty drives need for coaching assistance

The coaching field really took off when corporate executives in America recognized they had to plan their own careers and could not rely on staying in one corporate bureaucracy for their entire work life. In the heyday of the mergers of the late 1980's, it became clear that executives had to make their own career paths since the companies they worked for could be sold at any time. That is, even the best executives could be out of a job due to changes coming from above.

Over the past five years, the numbers of people utilizing the services of a personal coach has increased dramatically. The International Coach Federation says its online coach referral service gets 2,600 hits a month (www.coachfederation.org). Its membership has increased eightfold in the past two years, to 2400 members, but the Federation guesses the total number of coaches is more like 10,000.

Executive coaches: today's "secret weapon" for business success

According to Pat Hunter, a New Canaan, Conn. based executive coach with 30 years consulting and counseling experience, "A coach can help you clarify where you are in your career and what you want to do next. The coach's role is to suggest choices, to support and encourage your efforts, help you create a plan and stick to the plan." According to Thomas Leonard at Coach University (the first training institute for coaches), "Client and coach become a team, focusing on the client's goals and needs and accomplishing more than the client would alone." A coach can help you identify and improve behavior patterns such as procrastination or poor listening skills.

Executive coaches help leaders to better know themselves—something that is essential for succeeding in today's business climate. Emotional intelligence factors, as put forth by Daniel Goleman in his book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, are critical. Through one-on-one coaching, clients can gain awareness of these competencies and learn to:

- enhance personal communication style and listening skills
- deliver performance feedback, both positive and negative
- modify impulses and emotional responses

The coach's ultimate goal is to help clients improve performance and achieve results. Tailored to the specific needs of the individual, executive coaching is the most effective tool for closing the gap between current performance and desired goals.

"In today's corporate culture, it's every individual for him or herself. As a result, people may be reluctant to go to their manager when problems arise on the job, or the manager may be the problem" adds Pat Hunter. "A personal coach is a safe, confidential alternative—focused on achieving positive results with your best interests in mind."

How do you know if you need a coach or a psychotherapist?

The term "professional help" usually means psychotherapy performed by an MD in Psychiatry, a PhD psychologist, or an MSW social worker. Like psychotherapy, coaching is also performed by professionals with a range of different backgrounds. The coaching process entails an initial consultation followed by hourly sessions which may include various types of assessments to determine your abilities, preferences and interaction styles.

How do you know what kind of assistance you really need? One way to answer this question about coaching vs. psychotherapy could be with the following analogy: Psychotherapy: Personal Life—Coaching: Work Life. That is, if you want to improve your personal life or are contemplating a major personal transition, seek out the best psychotherapist you can. However, if you want to improve or change your work life, seek out the best coach you can find.

The following guideline may be further advice for you about whether you need a coach or a therapist. If you go to a coach but can't follow through on what he or she suggests, this may be an indicator that underlying anxiety or depression or upset over personal problems could be preventing you from using coaching. You may need to consult with a psychotherapist and address these feelings.

Traditional therapy addresses underlying issues and barriers to success

On the other hand, the opposite situation could also be true. You are in psychotherapy and get along well with your therapist and are beginning to understand some of the major themes of your life. But it is still possible you might find psychotherapy is not helping you to better your work life. In this kind of situation, you might consider consulting an individual coach to get concrete practical advice on how to improve your career. To bring things full circle, it would then be very relevant to discuss your feelings about these new work strategies with your psychotherapist or your coach.

Problems such as a difficult mid life crisis accompanied by despondency, hopelessness, feelings of disconnection from others still lead many people to traditional psychotherapy and rightfully so. But after the underlying depression is eased, some people in this category might benefit from consulting a career coach in order to explore the type of work that might suit the person they are becoming.

Psychologist Jeffrey Blum, PhD, states, "I have often found that psychotherapy and individual coaching for a business person go very well together. I have had many patients in psychotherapy who have benefited from consultations with individual coaches or consultants. The two fields—psychotherapy

and coaching—have many values in common in terms of wanting to help an individual achieve the level of his or her full potential but also to maintain balance between personal and work life”.

The best way to find the best available psychotherapist is to talk with your physician or close friends. The close friends route certainly applies to seeking a coach as well. You can also contact the local chapter of the International Coaching Federation or use the online database of coaches at the ICF website (www.coachfederation.org). Coach training organizations such as Coach University (www.coachu.com), or The Hudson Institute, all have databases of coaches participating in and certified by their training programs. Therapists and coaches often have professional relationships and refer clients as needed to their colleagues.

Patricia N. Hunter is a consultant and coach based in New Canaan, Conn. With over 30 years experience, her firm specializes in leadership development, executive coaching and career management. Dr. Jeffrey Blum is a psychologist and psychotherapist in private practice in New Canaan, Conn. He has published extensively on topics including couples therapy and relationship issues.