



How To Choose The Right Coach for You

By Donna Karlin

I'm often asked "How does one go about choosing a coach?" It's not simple question but an important one to answer. It's goes well beyond choosing a coach; it's important to figure out how to get the most out of the coaching relationship once you've made that choice. The synergy of the relationship is what makes the difference to any well-motivated client.

If you want to maximize the value of the coaching relationship, here are some ways to do it that work and work well.

First the basics:

- **Any coach you work with should be a member in good standing** of either (or both) the International Coach Federation and / or The International Association of Coaching and abide by the ethics and guidelines of the profession
- **Your coach should have coach specific training**, not just be a therapist who decides to call him/herself a coach. If you want a therapist, psychologist etc then hire one. Coaching and therapy are different.
- **Ask for testimonials** and I mean real names of real people, not initials of someone from some ambiguous organization. I ask my clients for permission to share their names and positions and they're only too happy to oblige.
- **Choose a coach who specializes in the right field or area of expertise.** If you want a coach to help you with personal relationships or issues, then hire a life coach. If you're an executive and want to be coached for work specific issues, then look for an executive coach. I am oversimplifying to demonstrate the point, however there are coaches in every niche imaginable. Choose the field that is in alignment with your needs. Once you've chosen the niche, ask the coach what level within the organization he/she works with. Your coach should understand what you're 'living'. There's a big difference between intensity and level of responsibility between middle managers and Deputy or Assistant Deputy Ministers or managers to corporate leaders.
- **Ask for a free 30 minute interview or session.** Try out your coach. Some will give you a free introductory session and others will credit the cost of part of your first coaching session if you sign a contract. Regardless, you should be able to have a trial to see if the coach is in alignment with your needs and that your personalities mesh. Many coaches will be more than happy to have that dialogue so you can see what they have to offer. You have to be a fit for the coach as well. Any coach who takes on any client just for the contract isn't the one to choose. Alignment and fit goes both ways.
- **Your coach should give you total commitment and presence** in your time together whether in person or on the phone. If there are interruptions and many scheduling changes on the part of your coach, then you are not the primary focus. You are contracting for commitment and paying for it. You should have it, no ifs ands or buts. If you're not getting it then find another coach.
- **Your coach should be flexible with regards to scheduling you**, but a good coach will be busy so keep that in mind. It's best to schedule in your sessions regularly so you don't have to scramble to get some time when you need it. Respect those appointments as you would with any other professional. If you cancel frequently, your coach will most probably cancel the contract. (This goes back to the point of putting some things on temporary hold.) If you're scrambling for time then it's not going to work. You need the mental focus to implement changes that will not only evolve you but will help you simplify your life.

Now the intangibles: You've chosen your Coach. How to ensure success in the relationship

- **You need to put some things on temporary hold to work with a coach.** You'll need some mental space for any coaching relationship to work well. Put some projects on hold, reduce your roles for the time being and streamline your work to name a few. It's a partnership. If you want to work with someone who will do things for you, then hire an assistant or consultant. If you want clarity, newfound awareness and a process within which you can make fundamental and sustainable changes in your life, then clear some space and work with a coach. If you're burdened, you'll want coaching to push you harder instead of evolve you and help you simplify. You need time to do this properly. Focus on how you feel and want to feel. Pick a coach who will help you work on intangibles, not just processes, tasks or skills.
- **Figure out what matters to you most,** not what a coach feels you should talk about. A good coach can discern dynamics. If the coach has to stay in control of the conversation, then it's about the coach, not you. The coaching relationship is one of the few you'll ever have where it's all about you. It's the most selfish relationship you'll ever have especially since it's one without judgment.
- **Give your coach feedback.** It's a two way street. If you feel you're not pushed enough (out of your comfort zone, speed, your 'buttons' being pushed etc) then ask your coach to push harder, and if you feel you're being pushed too hard then ask the coach to back off a bit. Contrary to what many people think, even the most masterful coaches aren't clairvoyant. You need to give ongoing feedback.
- **Feel coached all the time,** even when you're not being coached. Coaching is occurring all through your week, not just the sessions. What you talk about in your sessions will resonate throughout the week. All you have to do is be fully aware to integrate what you learned into your every day routine until it's second nature. It's not about how fast you learn...it's about how you integrate that learning within your world.
- **Coaching works in two areas of your life:** First you'll be helped to stretch beyond what you thought was possible, take more initiative and actions on your own and implement effective strategies to get what you want. Next, you'll also be identifying and reducing things that are putting a strain on your life, i.e. stressful situations, difficult relationships, pressured environments etc. Once these are identified, you'll be able to work at eliminating or redefining them. Work on your environment, not just you. All that surrounds you has a profound affect on every aspect of your life.
- **Keep the content of the sessions confidential.** You want the coach to keep everything under wraps, well that needs to work both ways. If you start giving advice to family, friends and colleagues based on what you did with your coach, then it's similar to you diagnosing and treating an ailment without the expertise or license. If you feel that individual would benefit from being coached then recommend coaching but don't do it. Leave coaching to the professionals. You'll be happier when you don't have to ultimately fix things if and when your advice doesn't work out. Besides which, a coach will give feedback and interact with you based on you and who you are. Nothing about coaching should be or is generic.
- **Revisit the relationship dynamics and often.** Redefine what you're doing and what you're going to be doing as the coaching process will help you change in many fundamental ways and the initial reasons for working with a coach will change over time. Make sure you articulate these new needs to your coach as those needs change.
- **You make the decisions.** It's important you realize your coach will help you get to where you want to go but ultimately all decisions you make are yours and yours alone. The coach is not accountable for your choices. As well, all your successes are yours because of the changes and choices *you* choose to make. Your coach should help you celebrate them not take credit for them.

Once you pick the right coach in the right niche and meet on a regular basis, the benefits of coaching will become apparent. This is because the synergy of the relationship is what makes the difference to any well-motivated client.

Donna Karlin Certified Executive and Political Leadership Coach, founder of A Better Perspective™ (www.abetterperspective.com) has pioneered the specialized practice of Shadow Coaching™ with over 130 senior organizational leaders in the public and private sectors.