

What is Personal Coaching and How Does it Work?

Personal Account: My Experience of Coaching

I became interested in the field of coaching by first being coached as a client. I continue to have such a coaching relationship today, although I have had more than one coach. From my experience in being a coaching client and a coach, I have found the coaching relationship to be one of the most powerful and liberating relationships in my life. A coach may be the only person in my life who does not have an agenda about what is best for me.

Family, friends, co-workers, with all their best intentions often "know" what is best for me. Though their intentions are good they are often too closely involved to set their ideas aside and allow me the opportunity to discover for myself what I want to create and discover in my life. Those who have served me as coach have greatly helped me in creating my own vision of the future and in making choices along the way.

More specifically, what is this thing called "coaching?" Like all attempts at definition, this one is evolving and fluid. What follows is just how I see it at the moment, and not "how it really is."

A. Personal and Professional Coaching is:

- **A relatively new and innovative profession quite distinct from sports coaching or counseling.** Coaching is not psychology, counseling, therapy, or religion; yet it has drawn tools and lessons from all of these.
- **An alliance designed by the coach and the client.** The client, with the help of the coach defines the goals of coaching and the scope of the process.
- **Designed to support and challenge the client in the process of lifelong learning, personal effectiveness and personal fulfillment.** The client may decide to focus on attaining specific goals (work, relationships, finances, etc.) or use the coaching process as an exploration of dreams and aspirations, or both.

B. Personal and Professional Coaching is distinct from:

- **Consulting:** A consultant is hired to solve a specific problem and is usually expected to have advice, opinions and solutions that are proposed. The client is then left to implement them. In a coaching relationship, the client discovers or creates his or her own solutions or insights and implements them with support from the coach.
- **Therapy:** Coaching does not intend to work on issues such as addictions, severe depressions, severe anxieties, phobias, destructive or abusive patterns or other such conditions. Coaching tends to focus on supporting the client in being in the present and creating a future rather than unraveling past trauma. In the process, however, most clients find that they achieve significant freedom from current limitations that they have linked to events of the past. "Not therapy, but often therapeutic" might be one way to describe the distinction.

David C. Hager

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- **Mentoring:** The mentor is someone who has walked a particular road before and therefore has experience and advice on how you should do what you are trying to do. While the coach may have abundant life experience, the coach uses these skills to support the client in finding his or her own unique path or fulfillment and not in giving advice.

C. Assumptions and Values Surrounding Coaching:

- **The client is naturally creative, resourceful and whole.** The coach merely supports the client in accessing his or her own internal and external resources.
- **The client really DOES have his or her “answers” or capability to create the answers.** The coach assists the client in accessing what the client already possesses.
- **The “agenda” for all coaching sessions comes from the client. The coach supports the client in integrating that agenda with all aspects of the client’s life.**
- **The agenda or focus of the coaching can change at any time, with permission of the client.**
- **Everything that happens in the client’s life or coaching work is an opportunity for learning, movement and fulfillment.** There is no “scrap” in coaching, only valuable recyclable materials.

D. The skills of the coach: There are many coaching styles and a good coach brings all of his or her personal life skills to the process. A few of the most important and commonly used are:

- Asking “powerful questions”
- Focused listening
- Intuition
- Summarization
- Supporting the client’s objectives with structures, plans and goals
- Challenging assumptions and perceived limitations
- Brainstorming possibilities
- Visualizing
- Re-framing

E. Who might benefit from personal and professional coaching? Since coaching is not intended to “fix” anything, coaching can benefit anyone who is either tired of the status quo in their life, or who is looking to create or experience new possibilities. A few situations in which people are particularly attracted to coaching . . .

- Being in transition or contemplating major life changes
- Wanting a sounding board for ideas and dreams
- Wishing to be held accountable for what you promise yourself you will do
- Wanting to create a clear plan of action
- Being caught in a repeating loop and wanting to break out of it
- Being stuck in “overwhelm” or procrastination
- Wanting to clarify and integrate life values, vision or purpose
- Wanting to create excellence in a major project or presentation

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F. My strengths and focus as a coach:

A coaching relationship seems to work best when it takes place in the framework of the client's whole life. While most coaching clients have a one or more dominant interests or objectives for coaching, attaining results in those specific areas always occurs in the context of issues of life-balance, well-being and overall fulfillment. This does not mean that coaching work does not have a focus. I do have areas of special focus, and most of the work I do for clients falls into one or more of these general categories:

- Expanding the client's capacity for effective, powerful and principled *leadership*
- Effectiveness in managing challenging *relationships, conflicts and disputes*
- Successfully facing and managing *life transitions* (career, relationships, personal aspirations)
- Coaching *leadership teams* in corporations and other organizations

G. How it works, in brief . . .

I normally suggest that we begin with a two-hour foundation session to gather personal information, clarify values, define personal goals and design the coaching relationship that will best challenge and support you in achieving your vision. After the foundation session, coaching takes place 3 or 4 times per month in 30 to 40-minute sessions on the telephone at a regularly scheduled time. I do not suggest that coaching be open ended. It seems to work better to set a period of 4 to 6 months in which to work on the client's objectives. We then can make a review of results and a decision to continue or not to continue coaching.

Coaching sessions are usually done over the telephone so I can easily work with you from anywhere in the world. The coaching relationship can be structured to best serve your unique needs. Some clients prefer to meet in person for their foundation session to get away from the day to day and see things from a new perspective. I can also travel to coach you in your business environment or in an inspirational setting that is meaningful to you.

Finally, there is the question of coaching for people who already have a friendship or a business relationship. Sometimes people find it more comfortable to work with a coach who they already know and trust and others prefer to use a coach with whom they have no track record. There is no right or wrong approach. My current professional coach is a person I knew well prior to hiring her as my coach. In fact, I was the person who inspired her to become trained and certified. We have no trouble changing "hats" in our conversation. We always know when we are "in role" as coach and client, and when we are in the broader expanse of friendship.

Most importantly, you, the client, define the coaching relationship and goals. If you feel the need for a unique structure or approach, we can design a plan that is comfortable, powerful and appropriate for you.

If you are attracted to any of these ideas and approaches, I invite you to try a complimentary 30 minute "sample" session. Whether or not you decide that coaching makes sense for you right now, I guarantee that you will enjoy and find value in the time spent on the sample session. Please call me and set up an appointment.

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Personal Profile

David is cross-trained in several distinct coaching approaches. His primary personal coaching training is from the Coaches Training Institute; one of the longest established and best respected personal coaching training institutes in the world. He has been trained as an Organizational Learning Coach by the LIM Institute, an international leader in organizational learning and leadership development programs. He has completed the Landmark Education Self-Expression and Leadership Program and works as a coach for that program. David has also studied "Career and Life Planning" with Richard Bolles, author of "What Color is Your Parachute." He is a member of the International Coach Federation.

Closely related with coaching skills, David is also a trained and internationally experienced mediator, facilitator and conflict resolution professional and practices actively in the fields of mediation and dispute resolution. He has had extensive experience in resolving disputes in complex and cross-cultural settings. He received mediation training from The Mediation Institute in Eugene, Oregon, The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Institute, and Process Facilitation training from the Strategic Thinking Group, and The Rummler-Brache Group.

In addition to coaching and mediation, David is a multi-talented professional drawing on over 27 years experience as an international executive, attorney, conflict resolution professional, and negotiator. David's professional life has encompassed several careers, industries and continents. As an international attorney he represented a wide range of clients in transactional and dispute resolution matters worldwide. Before recently returning the United States, he spent over 10 years living in Asia, managing businesses, negotiations and government affairs in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Southeast Asia.

David graduated with honors in Communications from the University of Minnesota and from the University of Michigan Law School. David has been admitted to practice law in Washington, New York, California, and Michigan, and before the US Federal Courts. He is also a member of the International Mensa Society, The Hong Kong Mediation Council and is a former Co-Chairman of the Hong Kong American Chamber of Commerce, China Business Committee.

The decision to focus his career on the "transformational" professions of coaching and mediation was crystallized by the experience of a near fatal-automobile accident in the summer of 2000. David sees coaching as a calling, and coaching others in their journeys of fulfillment and discovery to be one of the greatest honors and joys in his life.

In other areas of his life, he enjoys wilderness sports, meditation, carpentry, auto mechanics, and housecleaning. He lives on Bainbridge Island, Washington, with his wife Jennifer and three amazing children.