

## **The Independent Practitioner**

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### **The Therapist as Personal Coach: Reclaiming Your Soul!**

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A new profession has evolved that may be a vehicle for therapists who want to work with highly motivated clients who are not fragile and who want to make BIG changes in their life or their profession or business. I am referring to Life Coaching. *US News and World Report* (10/96) stated that Life Coaching is the second biggest consulting business right behind management consulting. And coaching is only in its infancy! There are only a few thousand trained coaches in the world and the numbers are far from reaching critical mass...In fact, the more coaches there are, the more quickly the public will find the effectiveness and convenience and benefits of hiring a personal coach. Remember there is a glut of therapists and large numbers are leaving the field every year and even more would like to leave. This is a potential bonanza for therapists who want to transition into the popular and growing field of Life Coaching.

Therapists already have many of the requisite skills to move into this emerging field. Psychologists turned coaches report that not only is coaching lucrative and professionally satisfying, it is delightful to help clients nationally and internationally (via tele-coaching) while sitting by the pool or on the deck, in jeans or shorts. They also like getting paid a monthly retainer in advance, a form of payment that increases the professionalism of the relationship. I have experienced newfound

joy for my work, feel enriched by my clients and their brilliance and I continue to have my own coach because of the integrity of "walking the talk."

The recent increase in the popularity of personal coaching has seen much media attention and a rise in the number of professionally trained coaches, making this one of the fastest growing new professions in many years. Along with this trend, many coach-training programs have developed to meet the varied needs of those desiring to be trained as professional coaches. (It is noteworthy that less than 15% of those training to be coaches are therapists. Imagine the edge in skills and experience that psychologists transitioning to coaching will bring to the field.)

The International Coach Federation (ICF) founded in 1997, stands as the entity which brings together all coaches as one professional body and has recently instituted (1998) a process to credential coaches in order to insure quality standards for anyone hiring a personal or professional coach. The ICF is non-profit and the largest association worldwide of personal and professional coaches.

Mental Health therapists are the best positioned professionals to take advantage of this societal trend away from pathology and toward more healthy or purposeful living. I believe that 'life coaching' is an evolutionary step beyond therapy, and therapists who have made the shift say it has revitalized their life and helped them reclaim the spirit that attracted them to mental health training

in the first place.

The coaching relationship is as energizing to the coach as it is to the client and for therapists who still enjoy working with challenging psychological disorders, this can be a nice balance to one's professional life. And it is free of managed care issues. No third party pay is involved in the coaching relationship and clients pay by monthly retainer and coaching relationships can last several months to several years. The coaching alliance brings back the therapeutic alliance that used to be paramount within the relationship built over time between psychologist and patient. With the advent of brief therapy and managed care constraints, this rarely occurs anymore. Why did we all get swallowed up in the medical model anyway? We and our clients have done ourselves a disservice by requiring "sickness" to be the reason for seeking assistance in living a more fulfilling life.

There will continue to be persons who NEED the services of a psychologist for treatment of a true diagnosable condition such as PTSD, depression and other clear psychological disorders. However, most psychologists often see people for "problems in living" or life challenges which present as general malaise, anxiety, worry, stress and other symptoms or complaints from one's life. That is why coaching has and will continue to be a popular choice for clients...because it avoids unnecessary diagnostic labels and the stigma of seeing a therapist and is a private contract for service between the coach and the client.

Seeking the services of a personal coach is a fundamental shift in how the general public seeks assistance from a trained helper who can listen, understand and assist them in desired changes in their life. Life coaching also goes beyond improving one's present life and moves the client into designing a desired and compelling future. In addition, it avoids the stigma that has often been associated with seeing a therapist. No one really NEEDS a coach, but once they find out what it is and how a coaching relationship can assist him or

her, they WANT it.

The large portion of the population who have not needed a therapist or chosen not to engage in therapy can greatly benefit from choosing to have a relationship with a personal life coach. Coaching is also appropriate for those persons who have "completed" any necessary therapy work and are now coachable. Coaching is a special form of consulting that is a co-creative partnership wherein the main focus is the client's agenda and his or her desire for creating a fulfilling life, personally and professionally.

### ***Corporate Coaching Opportunities***

Corporate coaching is also rising in popularity. It has been common for many years for CEOs and top managers to have a coach or mentor relationship, but now, corporations are seeking to have coaches available for management teams, and to train their managers to coach their employees instead of supervise. Corporate America has spent millions of dollars on various training's but often the new skills or techniques learned are forgotten or unused a few weeks later. Adding a personal coach to the equation can cement learning, retain focus, enhance relationships, ensure sustainable results, dramatically impact the overall culture and has accountability built in. Diane Menendez, Ph.D., an executive coach in Cincinnati states, "Often we act as if coaching in the corporate environment is for 'fixing' problems and sometimes it is to prevent leaders from derailing. But the real value of coaching for Leaders are these outcomes: through coaching, they discover their true gifts as a person and a leader; they learn to live from the inside out; and they discover their purpose, values, and how to create their lives and their leadership so that they are living authentically."

The winter 97 edition of *Public Personnel Management*, Vol. 26, issue 4, compared training alone vs. coaching AND training and found that training alone increased

productivity by 22.4% and training AND coaching increased productivity by 88%. Additionally, with the increasingly popular interest in coping with rapid change, the importance of workplace relationships and the value of and the integration of emotional intelligence (from the work of Daniel Goleman) who better to promote and address these issues within the corporate culture, than an experienced therapist who has become a coach? One caveat...as a coach, we do not present ourselves as a therapist as that is not well received in the corporate environment, but our credentials do help IF we use them creatively when wearing our "coaching hat." The combination of a therapist's credentials and training as a coach is very attractive in today's corporate environment.

### ***But Where Did the Concept of Coaching Originate?***

Prior to the evolution of the coach training programs referred to above, coaching was a term primarily used in the arts (voice coaches, drama coaches), athletics, and the corporate world. Many executives hired outside consultants as coaches or mentors to give them an outside and unbiased view of their business life and get help with their personal life as well. Now coaching is seen as both valuable and convenient to the general business person (professional, entrepreneur, middle manager and even the "average" citizen who just sees the value in a mentor or guide) for assistance in "total life coaching." Due to the "formal" training available to prospective coaches who come from a variety of disciplines and work experience, the general public can now find a personal coach who is well trained to assist them in achieving their big goals and desires in their personal or their professional life. While this training is very professional and allows many non-therapists to become professional coaches, they certainly do not have the many skills, which are transferable

from the years of schooling, and professional experiences of seasoned mental health practitioners. **Therapists can be exceptional coaches as long as they learn the distinction between therapy and coaching and develop the business and entrepreneurial skills necessary to build a successful coaching business. Trained therapists are already experts at listening, encouraging, and facilitating change in addition to:**

- ◆ Empathy
- ◆ Intuition
- ◆ Respect for confidentiality
- ◆ Strong boundaries
- ◆ Reframing
- ◆ Objectivity and being non-judgmental
- ◆ Unconditional positive regard
- ◆ Acceptance of emotions (they have heard it all)
- ◆ Master of powerful questions and inquiry
- ◆ Good problem solvers and "possibility thinkers"

Historically, there have always been "coaches" of some sort in society. It might have been the town priest, the shaman, an elder (grandfather, uncle) or some other mentor relationship. But society seems to have lost that common connection and those relationships are not as easily accessed nor as available due to the breakup of families, and the "geographical migration" of family members away from their place of birth. The world today is global and rapid paced, and there is a general sense of disconnection in many people. There are very few formed mentor relationships and those that have them are fortunate. Life Coaching is a profession whose time has come!

Personal Coaching has really developed from three streams:

- 1) the helping professions such as psychotherapy and counseling,
- 2) consulting and organizational development, and
- 3) Personal Development training such as

EST, Lifespring, Landmark Forum, Anthony Robbins, and others whose one-on-one “coaching” was part of the delivery of these materials.

Although there is a significant distinction between therapy approaches and coaching, many of the early psychological theories are antecedents to modern day personal coaching. Most notably, the early theories of Alfred Adler and Carl Jung.

Adler saw himself more as a personal educator, believing that people developed their unique life approaches which shaped their goals, values, habits and personal drives. He believed that happiness arose from a sense of significance and social connectedness, not merely individual objectives and desires. Adler saw each person as the creator and artist of his or her life and frequently involved his clients in goal setting, life planning and inventing their future, and used techniques common to strategic therapies such as role-playing, acting “as if,” and paradoxical intent.

Jung also believed in the power of connectedness and relationship, as well as a “future orientation” or a teleological belief that we can create our futures through visioning and purposeful living. Jung’s writings really focused on life issues of our later years, such as midlife career changes, spirituality, individuation, and life purpose. His approach often “coached” adults through a “life review” to encourage his clients to consciously live their lives via expressing their natural gifts and talents and moving toward self-individuation by living life “on purpose.”

More recent psychological approaches that are “solution-focused” and are not insight or depth psychologies are also precursors of modern day coaching. Glasser’s Reality Therapy and Choice Therapy, Ellis’ Rational Emotive Therapy, systemic family therapies, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Psychosynthesis, Ericksonian hypnotherapy and many other hybrids of these lend

themselves to coaching strategies because pathology is not the main focus but instead they emphasize behavior change through increased awareness and choices for desired future results and solutions to current “problems in living.”

The Personal Development courses mentioned above (EST, Lifespring, Landmark Forum, and Anthony Robbins) all focus on taking personal action and responsibility for one’s life choices. They often include one-on-one coaching as part of their service or recommended it to those who desired to achieve sustainable results from the weekend trainings.

It is important to recognize the major distinctions between therapy and coaching. Therapy deals more predominately with a person’s past and painful events (trauma) which brought them to seek therapy (healing). Coaching deals more with a person’s present and seeks to guide them to a more desired future. With coaching little time is spent in the past, except for brief “visits” and the focus is on developing the person’s future. A clearer analogy is that of driving a car. What you see in the rear view mirror is therapy. What you see in the front window is coaching. People use a coach to help them look forward and to keep them on a chosen path, even if they have to make side trips on occasions. Who better to be available as a coach than a seasoned therapist who knows how to apply previously learned skills from therapy training and has learned new coaching skills to become a masterful life coach?

My view is that we are on the verge of a fundamental shift in how people seek helpers and why they seek them. People today need connection with a mentor/coach/guide more than ever before, due to the rapid pace of change, difficulty of sustainable relationships, desire to live one’s life purpose and many other reasons. I believe that the profession of Life Coaching will be bigger than

psychotherapy in a very few years, and the general public will know the distinction between therapy and coaching and will be clear on when to seek a therapist and when to seek a coach. Likewise, many clients might engage in therapy for specific life issues for which psychotherapy is the remedy, but then would continue on their path of advanced personal development in a coaching relationship. Only about 10% of the population seeks the services of a psychotherapist at any given time. That leaves 90% who might enjoy a relationship with a coach. ***Now is the time to move into this growing and cutting edge profession.*** You can easily maintain your therapy practice while you transition and you can have a dual practice while you transition and you can have a dual practice, choosing to see ONLY the therapy clients you really want to work with and balance your life with coaching clients who you want to attract.

In fact, special niches in coaching are natural extensions of what many of use have done in our therapy practice, such as “relationship coaching,” “parent coaching,” coaching for students, family business coaching (from a systemic perspective), ADD coaching, and others. Coaching programs are already being developed in public schools and there is a training entity called EDUCOACH that trains teachers coaching skills as well. Child psychologists and family therapists can be particularly creative and impactful on

today’s concerns with children by developing programs and services as a coach with that population.

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### ***Why People Seek a Coach Today***

A person does not need to be “sick” to seek a Coach. In fact, it is the healthy person who wants more out of life and does not want to settle for mediocrity that sees the benefit of a Coach. The ICF members polled coaching clients and 98% reported that coaching was well worth the investment. All great people in history have had a mentor or guide or a strong support system that was a critical factor in their rise to “greatness.” People might be successful without a Coach, but those who want the gold medal and not just play the game will seek a Coach to hold them accountable and to get more out of them than they could have alone. The quest for personal and spiritual growth and finding one’s purpose is very popular again like it was in the 60’s and 70’s, but it is even reaching into the business and corporate community. As we approach the new millennium, personal growth is hot — diagnosis is not!

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