

10 Things to Help You Find the Right Coach

Knowing how to go about choosing a coach can be a tricky business. But by thinking through a few things beforehand, you can assess how coaching might help and then find a professional, qualified, skilled coach who will work well with you and who is suited to your needs. Then you will be in a good position to contact a prospective coach to have an initial conversation with them to see if they are suitable. Here are 10 things to consider:

1. What is coaching?

Being clear about what coaching is is a good first step. There are many different definitions of and approaches to coaching, but coaching can be seen as a collaborative process based on 1:1 conversations between you and a coach, focusing on helping you with self-directed personal and professional development, learning and growth. The coach is a facilitator of change, supporting you to identify and work towards your coaching goals.

Some coaches have specialisms working with particular client groups or topics, such as executive or leadership coaching, career coaching, health and wellness coaching, or life coaching for enhancing wellbeing in people's personal lives. Many coaches, however, will be able to offer support across a range of issues and client groups.

2. Different coaching approaches and techniques

The development of coaching has been strongly influenced by adult learning and counselling theory and practice. Some professional coaches have training in particular approaches such as person-centred psychology, cognitive-behavioural methods, positive psychology, narrative psychology, or NLP. Rather than relying on a single approach, many coaches use an eclectic range of approaches and methods, depending on the client and issues they bring to coaching. A good coach should be able to describe to you how they work in their practice, and what techniques or tools they might offer.

Ultimately, rather than focusing too much on differences between various approaches, it may be better just to be sure that a coach has sound training, qualifications and experience. A good working relationship and rapport between you and coach is also a key ingredient in successful coaching outcomes, and it is this that will underpin working well with a coach towards your goals.

3. Qualifications, experience and attributes of a coach

There are a wide range of training options and qualifications for coaches: from short, uncertificated courses and workshops, to certificate, diploma, Masters and even doctorate level qualifications. Check a coach's training and other relevant qualifications and experience. Also check out whether the coach has any testimonials from previous clients. A coach should be able to share with you any knowledge or experience they have of coaching people with goals similar areas to yours.

Consider whether a coach's career history, knowledge and life experience might help you feel more confident in their ability to support someone in your position. This might be because, for example, they have experience of working in similar organisations/sectors as yourself, or because they come from a different background that might help you explore fresh perspectives. Also consider whether there are any other particular important attributes or qualities you would like in a coach.

4. What do you want to get out of coaching?

Although a good coach will usually help you to specify precisely what coaching outcomes and goals you want to work towards, it is helpful beforehand about to have an idea about what it is you want to change and achieve overall. This will help you be sure that coaching is the best type of support. It will also help a coach discuss with you how achievable your goals might be with coaching.

5. What else have you considered?

Contemplating whether there are any alternatives to coaching can help you feel confident about getting the best support with the issues and challenges you face, and that coaching is right for you. Depending on your needs, the following might be alternative/additional sources of suitable help:

- a professional business advisor or other service provider
- a professional or personal training course or workshop
- self-study, learning and reading
- counselling or therapy if you primarily want to deal with emotional or psychological issues.

Although they won't have the same independence or necessarily the skills or experience of a professional coach, talking things through with someone you trust in your professional or personal network might help, especially if they have knowledge or contacts in a relevant subject matter. This may be useful as an additional, complementary source of support, even if you do decide to go ahead with some coaching.

6. Your time and commitment?

If coaching appears right for you, think through how you will devote sufficient time, energy and commitment to the coaching process to help its success. To make the most of your coaching, are you prepared to take action and work towards your goals in between coaching sessions? How determined are you to put into practice the changes you want and to continue your development and learning if necessary after the coaching sessions finish?

7. Money

Coaches should be upfront and clear about what fees they charge for their professional coaching services. You will need to know who will be paying for the coaching programme. If your coaching objectives are work-related and you work for an organisation, they might pay for the costs or contribute towards them. Or if you are paying for the coaching yourself, what sort of budget do you have?

8. How will the coaching work - format, duration, etc?

An initial enquiry with a coach should enable them to discuss with you the likely duration, frequency and structure of coaching sessions. The coach should be able to outline the way that they work and the style of delivery of coaching that they usually adopt, and discuss with you what will suit you best, depending on the outcomes you want.

Quite often coaching involves something like 4-6 sessions every 2-4 weeks. However, some people undertake coaching over quite a long period of a year or two, whilst others

only have a couple of sessions. Coaches often offer some flexibility with this. Overall, a coach should be able to deliver creatively a coaching programme that takes account of your needs, preferences and how you like to learn best.

9. How will coaching sessions take place?

As well as face-to-face, these days coaching is possible and can work well via video conferencing calls such as Skype or FaceTime. This is useful when geographical distance makes it difficult or impossible to meet in person, although some coaches prefer at least the first coaching session to be face-to-face if at all possible. Some coaches also offer coaching over the telephone. For some people, having the right coach is more important than having to meet face-to-face, but for others, it's essential to be able to meet face-to-face regularly.

10. Written agreements, membership of coaching bodies and ethics

A clear written agreement from the coach that is signed by both coach and coachee at the start of a coaching programme is an important way of making clear how the coaching will work and what both parties can expect from each other. It should cover key issues such as confidentiality, payment, cancellation of sessions and termination of the programme.

Check out that a coach is a member a professional coaching association (such as the Association for Coaching, European Mentoring and Coaching Council, or International Coach Federation) and follows a Code of Ethics in their coaching.

Good luck!

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