

What is Life Coaching, and How Can it Help Me?

Ever feel overwhelmed? Are you frustrated with having dreams and goals that you never seem to accomplish? Do you wish you had an objective person to talk with about solving life's reoccurring problems? Do you ever wish you could have someone help you plan a roadmap for the life you want to live? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, maybe you should consider hiring a Life Coach.

Life Coaching is a relatively new helping field that is currently experiencing tremendous growth worldwide. Although coaching is a new way to help solve problems, its impact can be seen in most areas of society today (Williams & Davis, 2002). Before we can begin to speak about Life Coaching, the first question that must be answered is: What exactly is a Life Coach and how can hiring one benefit me?

“Who, exactly, seeks out a coach? Winners who want even more out of life.” (Chicago Tribune, 2000)

Ellis, a pioneer in the Life Coaching field and author of the best selling college textbook in America, *Becoming a Master Student*, defined Life Coaching in this way:

Life Coaches assist people in discovering what they want in life and unlocking their own brilliance to achieve it. Life Coaching is about people generating their own answers, not looking outside of themselves for solutions. This process is not about teaching what you already know or about clients acting as students. Instead, Life Coaching is empowering people to invent something new - to think something they've never thought before and to say something they've never said before. (Ellis, 1998, as quoted in Williams & Davis 2002, p. 13).

Coaching is partnering with clients in a creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Professional Coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their lives. Coaches help people improve quality of their lives. Coaches are trained to listen, to observe, and to customize their approach to meet individual client needs. The coach provides support to enhance the skills and creativity that the client already has and is perhaps too overwhelmed or confused to even realize. A Life Coach can help you to sort out everyday problems as well; they just don't delve into mental illness that would require the help of a mental health professional such as a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist.

Futurologist and sociologist, Alvin Toffler predicted a dramatic change in society in his 1970 book, *Future Shock*. Most would agree Toffler got it right when he wrote:

In the three short decades between now and the twenty-first century, millions of ordinary, psychologically normal people will face an abrupt collision with the future. Citizens of the world's most advanced nations, many of them will find it increasingly painful to keep up with the incessant demand for change that characterizes our time. For them, the future will have arrived too soon (Toffler, 1970, p. 9).

Don't most of us feel this way? We need Life Coaches because society has gone from being stable and mostly predictable to being impersonal, fast paced, and in constant flux. Whitworth,

Kimsey-House, and Sandahl (2007) believe the profession of Life Coaching has emerged out of this tremendous shift and flux in society. In the 1950's, people generally stayed married, kept their careers for 30 years, and didn't move far from home or certainly not as often as they do today.

The 50's saw most of the population having loyalty to their company of employment, so there were few career transitions. Most people retired from the company they began working at when they were immediately finished with high school or college. We only have to look around to see that society has changed. The trend in society now is to be self-employed or well vested. The main desire of most people today is to be very mobile and entrepreneurial.

“Part consultant, part motivational speaker, part therapist and part rent-a-friend, coaches work with managers, entrepreneurs, and just plain folks, helping them define and achieve their goals – career, personal or, most often, both.” (*Newsweek*, 1996)

So much change produces anxiety in much of the population. Where do we find our mentors in a society that has gone from being stable and mostly predictable to one that is fast paced, impersonal, and constantly evolving at such a quick pace? Surely, mentoring has been around as long as human beings have had relationships. Mentor was the name of the royal advisor to Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*. When we need counsel, advice, or support, we usually turn to a trusted person who may serve as a consultant or advisor in suggesting a course of action – a mentor. Coaching and mentoring have a great deal in common in that a professional coach is similar to a mentor except that the coach's role is more clearly defined.

A professional coach has no other relationship to the client than that of a coach; therefore, there are no hidden agendas or conflicts of interest. According to Dreyfus (n.d.), we turn to a coach when we want to become better at something – we want to actualize our potential and develop a plan of action that will help us reach a vision of the way things could be. We may simply need a second pair of eyes to help analyze a situation or a boost of our confidence. A coach can start with where we are; they can work as a collaborator to help realize your goals. A coach can help define and clarify your goals and then work with you to develop a plan of action for reaching those goals.

This type of collaboration with coaches to enhance our natural abilities has been practiced for decades in the sports arena - not only with amateur athletes, but with multi-million dollar professionals as well. Although consistently praised as one of the greatest professional golfers ever, Tiger Woods still collaborates daily with a golfing coach. His coach not only provides expertise on golf, but also feedback on a plan for Tiger to improve his game. Similarly, Michael Jordan, Roger Staubach, and myriad other hall-of-fame athletes leaned heavily on the expertise of coaches to help further refine their skills, even after these athletes were already considered some of the best practitioners in their respective sport. The implication being, you can always improve your performance if the desire is there.

Life Coaching has developed from three streams: (1) helping professions such as psychotherapy and counseling and related theoretical perspectives, (2) consulting and organizational development and industrial psychology, and (3) personal development training.

Where did Life Coaching come from?

Life Coaching can trace its psychological roots back to the early part of the twentieth century to the theorists who pioneered the shift from seeing clients as ill or pathological toward viewing them as “well and whole.” Life Coaches see clients as brilliant and whole people and focus not on pathology, but on wellness. Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, for example, broke away from Freud’s theories of neuroses and psychosis and posited theories that were more teleological and optimistic about the human potential. While there remains today a significant distinction between therapy approaches and coaching, many of Adler and Jung’s theories are antecedents to the Life Coaching practiced today (Williams & Davis, 2002).

Adler, for example, believed that every person developed a unique life approach, which shapes his or her goals, values, habits, and personal drives. Adler believed that personal happiness came from sense of significance and social connectedness, not from mere individual objectives and desires. He believed each of us was the creator of his or her life and quite often involved his clients in goal setting, life planning, and “inventing” their future—all tenets and approaches in Life Coaching today (Williams & Davis, 2002).

Similarly, Jung believed in the power of connectedness and relationships and the teleological belief that we create our futures through visioning and purposeful living. It was Jung who often coached clients through a “life review” and encouraged his clients to consciously live their lives by expressing their natural talents and moving toward self-individuation (Williams & Davis, 2002).

It was the influences of the Humanistic Psychology and Human Potential movement that brought about the emergence of client-centered approaches that saw the client as full of potential and all sorts of possibilities. The influence of the theories of Maslow, Bugenthal, Fadiman & Fager, Frankl, and Rogers are prominent in this movement (Williams & Davis, 2002). The "Humanistic Movement" set the perspective for Life Coaching as it is practiced today.

Carl Rogers (1951) defined counseling as relationships in which the client was assumed to have the ability to change and grow by the clinician creating a therapeutic alliance. Rogers called this safe, confidential space that evolved from the therapeutic alliance “unconditional positive regard.” Many psychologists and counselors, including Williams and Davis (2002), believe this shift in perspective was the significant precursor to what is known as Life Coaching today.

Abraham Maslow’s publication of *Motivation and Personality* (1954) was the study of the “healthy personality” who he termed “self-actualizers.” He observed, researched, and questioned people who were living with purpose and vitality and who were seeking to grow psychologically. These were people who wanted to achieve more of their human potential. Williams and Davis (2002) believe Maslow’s publication provided the key point in history that set the framework for the field of Life Coaching that emerged in the 1990’s. “ People seeking personal evolution and *ways to live their life more fully do not need psychological counseling*; Life Coaching is a more accurate paradigm for the improved outcomes or achievements the clients seek,” (Williams & Davis, 2002, p. 14.) How many of us could use some help in setting priorities in our lives, improving our job performance to get the next promotion, or simply taking that great idea we have for a business to the next step? . . . most all of us who lead busy lives!

Thomas J. Leonard was a key player in the field of personal and business coaching. Leonard began a personal-coaching practice in 1982, as an evolution of the work he was already doing for

clients as a certified financial planner. He found his clients soon wanted much more than knowing what stocks to buy. They wanted to acquire much more in life than wealth itself and Leonard wanted to find a way to help give them what they wanted. He found his financial clients asking how to have a better, life, career, or personal relationship - just a better way to have the things in life they wanted without being fried by overwork and stress (Leonard, 1998).

In 1992, Leonard began to teach others how to thrive in the field he has created. Leonard says it was his teaching—the sharing of great new success stories almost every day that evolved his thinking even further. This evolution of thinking led Leonard to create the material published in his 1998 book, *The Portable Coach*. Leonard lists 28 principles that help people shape a life, career, and relationship in what Leonard calls the 28 steps in the "Principles of Attraction."

"I never cease to be amazed at the power of the coaching process to draw out the skills or talent that was previously hidden within an individual, and which invariably finds a way to solve a problem previously thought unsolvable."

(John Russell, Managing Director, Harley-Davidson Europe LTD.)

Leonard says reading *The Portable Coach* is the closest thing possible to having a series of sessions with a great Life Coach. He stresses that following the 28 steps is not like joining a cult or embracing a dogmatic approach because there is no guru. Leonard tells readers to find five of the 28 principles they generally agree with, even if they may seem a little challenging. He says if five can be found, then chances are that all 28 will open up for you by the time you have read them over closely. He tells readers if they don't find that many, just close the book now and trust you'll find your "better way" someplace else, another time (Leonard, 1998, p. 13).

Leonard's book offers some wonderful insights into what coaching can offer, but there is nothing like working with a good coach to feel like you are moving forward with your life in the way you desire it to move. As one client put it, "Working with my Life Coach allows me to feel like I am off of that train that I got on each day and just rode to wherever it took me. I was struggling to just get the basic things done. Now I am in the driver's seat taking my life in the direction and destination I desire. I have a path with a goal now and so I move forward daily toward that goal. Life Coaching offers a down to earth and plausible way to relate and solve everyday life problems."

Certification of Life Coaches

While by law you do not need a certification to begin Life Coaching as a profession, a good certification establishes the foundation for beginning this career path. Current fees for Life Coaching services vary widely, depending on the level of training of the coach and area of the country, but most coaches command fees from \$100 to \$300 per hour—sometimes more for corporate or executive coaches. Once upon a time coaching was generally for people who are already successful and viewed coaching as valuable in helping them achieve more, make big changes, and live more of the life they really wanted to live (Williams & Davis, 2002). However, Life Coaching is becoming more available to the general population, and income levels are becoming less a factor in who may obtain Life Coaching. People who want to become winners hire Life Coaches. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics lists "Life Coach" as the third highest paying job that doesn't require a college degree. According to these statistics, 20 percent of Life

Coaches registered with related industry organizations claim to make at least \$100,000 yearly, second only to airline pilots at \$138,000, and air traffic controllers at \$107,000 per year (Helium, Inc., 2007, ¶ 5).

Whether you wish to hire a coach to help with everyday problems, goal attainment, creating action plans or if you're interested in exploring the prospects of becoming a certified Life Coach, the field deserves serious exploration. Life Coaches can help you connect your vision with your goal and assist you in obtaining that goal - not becoming mired down in the tasks. Make your results more obvious in your life - Hire a coach!

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