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ADR and life coaching

What is coaching? Why be coached?

Sue Fick

Coaching. The word seems to be everywhere now. This is a new industry and in America it's the second fastest growth industry after IT. But don't let that put you off. Australians are taking to personal life coaching and making it their own.

The world of getting results and having a mentor has, in the past, been mainly in the business sphere. Now, however, people are hiring coaches for a range of goals, such as improving their relationships, setting up businesses, becoming free of debt, writing novels, having more fun, developing their spiritual paths and growing vegetables — you name it.

Few of us have overcome procrastination. Many of us feel the answers to our problems lie in ourselves but we seldom plan for the results we want — we generally hope or think vaguely about the issues. Neither is satisfying or effective. However, the process of telling someone else what you're aiming for and working from week to week on the nuts and bolts of getting there, can help to make it happen.

Coaching is a structured program of support that helps you to manage yourself. The nature and level of support obviously vary from person to person.

People usually come to a coach because they have not been able to manage an aspect of their lives through their own devices. Sometimes the goal they're after is what they most wish for and, for various reasons, most neglect. The wish may come with feelings of guilt, fear or doubt. So although it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out the strategies to achieve the goal, a person might need support to get through the first step, which is to decide to do something. And because doubt, guilt and fear don't disappear overnight, consistency of support is what makes the difference.

Throughout the process, a coach

encourages, helps to identify resistance, acts as a sounding board, listens and challenges. Ideally by the end of the series of sessions, the client has 'internalised' the ability to identify the step needed and get on with doing it. In my view, a good series of sessions builds in strategies to sustain the changed behaviour or outcome.

Coaching can be viewed as a conflict management tool. In the first instance, this could be managing conflict within yourself, ranging from the mild ('when am I going to get round to growing vegies?') to the more serious ('this job is killing my enjoyment of life and my relationship but I can't see any way out').

Essentially, the dispute arises from some part of yourself that is dissatisfied with the way things are and has put off doing something for too long. As with mediation, the coaching process helps people to clarify the dissatisfaction, state the preferred outcome, explore the way they tend to operate, generate options, and make choices and agreements.

A person who has made a commitment to achieve their goals and to manage themselves is, simply, a happier person. They are experiencing clearer direction and the satisfaction of actually attending to the things that are truly important to them. This is a person who is taking responsibility for their own dissatisfaction, wishes or needs and is less likely to create conflict with someone else because of their own shortcomings.

Coaching is sometimes viewed with suspicion, as if it is therapy with a new name. Although it is not therapy, it has something in common with cognitive behavioural therapy and solution focused therapy. It is action and future oriented. The coaching process does not focus on analysing the past or spend a lot of time trying to understand what caused the problem. Rather, it focuses on envisioning

exactly where you want to go and what it will take, step by step, to get there. Some of those steps may analyse what is getting in the way, whether it is a thought, belief or situation. However, the step, or way forward, is rooted in action. By taking action in the world, you change your experience or view of yourself, which generates an increased sense of well-being, which in turn leads to greater proactivity.

The coaching process acknowledges the difficulties in making changes and, if necessary, structuring steps to build and maintain support. Just as the mediator 'reality tests' agreements, so too does the coach ensure that the changed behaviour is sustainable. The coach and the mediator have many skills in common. Each role involves the ability to listen, question, remain neutral, be empathetic, be assertive, understand the parameters of the role and think creatively.

In summary, the coaching process involves identifying the dissatisfactions, articulating the vision, identifying strategies, being aware of obstacles, setting specific actions, acknowledging successes, building resources and support and keeping on track.

Just as the mediation process encourages parties to move from positions to interests, so too does the coaching process encourage moving from 'things to do lists' to value based goal setting so that one's daily actions are set in a meaningful context.

In his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey makes a distinction between the character ethic and the personality ethic. The character ethic is based on values such as integrity, humility, courage, justice, patience, temperance, industry, simplicity and modesty. The personality ethic is based on 'quick fix' influencing techniques, communication skills and positive attitudes. He emphasises that there is no short cut to developing one's character. The first few habits of the book come under the umbrella of what he calls 'private victory'. These are the habits of self-management or mastery. In my

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experience, coaching works primarily with
these first habits (depending, of course, on
the client) which are 'being proactive',
'beginning with the end in mind' and
'putting first things first'.

Self-management takes commitment and
is sometimes confronting, so coaching is
not for the faint hearted. I would say that
you need a sufficient degree of 'well-
being' to engage in the coaching process.

Author of *Learned Optimism*, Martin
Seligman, said that optimistic behaviours
enhance success. Undertaking a coaching
series is an expression of optimism about
one's self and about the future. ●

*Sue Fick works as a life coach, mediator
and trainer. You can find out more about*

*how coaching works on her website:
www.suefick.com.au.*

Suggested reading:

Covey S *The Seven Habits of Highly
Effective People* Simon & Schuster New
York 1989.

Grant AM and Greene J *It's your life.
What are you going to do with it? –
Coach Yourself* Pearson Education Ltd
Great Britain 2001.

Zeus P and Skiffington S *The Complete
Guide to Coaching at Work* McGraw Hill
Australia 2000.

Leonard TJ *The Portable Coach* Scribner
New York 1998.

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Stephenson P *Executive Coaching* Alfred
A Knopf Inc 1991.

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