

What's a Life Coach, Anyway?

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At the age of 49, I was desperate for a new career. I had been working in the mental-health field for over 30 years. You could say I was a little burned out. I live in the mountains and wanted a home-based business so I could kiss my commute goodbye.

I also wanted a career where I could use my hard-won mental-health skills. Previous jobs had me working with clients who were not voluntarily seeking help. This time, I wanted to help people who truly desired change and were motivated to take action towards their own success. I hoped and prayed I wasn't asking for too much. Lo and behold, I actually found what I was looking for—life coaching! It has met all my requirements and more.

When I excitedly told my friends and family about my plan to become a life coach, they all said, "Good for you!" After they saw that I was serious about my new pursuit, some of them meekly admitted they had no idea what a life coach actually does. When I clumsily provided them with an answer, hoping they weren't paying close attention, I realized that even I didn't have a good understanding of life coaching.

I went back to school to get my certification as a life coach (actually I got two—one general and one specialized—don't ever call me unthorough.) I also took a marketing course and started building a website (as well as many other tasks) necessary to start my online business. And yes, I finally acquired a clearer description of what a life coach does... here goes:

The International Coach Federation (ICF), which is the leading, professional, global organization for life coaches, defines coaching as: "Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential."

The ICF lists four responsibilities of coaches:

- 1) Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve.
- 2) Encourage client self-discovery.
- 3) Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies.
- 4) Hold the client responsible and accountable.

Inevitably, the next question arises: "If you were already a psychologist, why did you have to go to school to be a life coach?" The



answer is that, technically, I didn't have to. I chose to. Life coaching currently is an unregulated industry. (It won't be much longer.) Anyone, even people with no training or experience, can call themselves life coaches—and charge money for their services.

I wanted formal training to learn precisely how to be a life coach. I didn't want to assume I knew what coaching was just because I am a psychologist. While life coaching and counseling have similarities, they also have differences. One difference is that counseling focuses more on examining emotions, while life coaching concentrates on goals, accountability and results.

As a coach, I typically don't ask, "How does that make you feel?" Instead, I ask, "What action you have taken this week towards your goals?" At the same time, paying attention to and fostering intuition is a big part of my coaching. One's deeper life purpose often takes some work to discover.

Another difference relates to what clients want. Therapy clients often are seeking relief from intense distress, depression, anxiety, trauma, or resolution of painful relationships. Coaching clients are not



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necessarily in significant emotional distress and often feel ready to make changes in their lives, even if they are not sure what those changes are.

Coaching is collaborative. You and your coach work together as equals. After all, you are the primary expert on your life. Together, the two of you come up with new ways to approach obstacles so you can immediately start seeing success on your chosen goals. Your coach helps you think outside the box. Clients often make gains quicker than they ever anticipated. Additionally, most coaches offer free support by email, text, or phone calls between sessions.

Overall, coaching assists people to reach beyond habitual behavior patterns and truly start living the lives they have always wanted. Of course, the key is a solid and consistent commitment on the part of the client. Some coaching clients have specific ambitions, such as improving stress management, growing their business, or losing weight. Other coaching clients can have less precise goals at the outset, like achieving more balance and fulfillment in their lives, finding their true selves, or exploring a new career.

If you want someone to be honest, supportive, and encouraging, while advancing your motivation and inspiring you stay dedicated to your personal vision, then a life coach may be in your future. ■

For more information, visit the ICF website at CoachFederation.org. If you are unsure whether you need a therapist or a life coach, I would be happy to help you figure that out. I offer a free, no-obligation consultation that will help get you on the right path.



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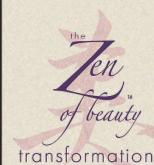
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