

# How is Coaching Distinct from Other Service Professions?

## What is Professional Coaching?

“Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential,” is the definition of coaching according to the International Coach Federation (ICF). ICF is the globally recognized, independent credentialing organization for coach practitioners and coach-training programs. Coaches regard the client as the expert in his/her life and work, and believe every client is creative, resourceful and whole. This is particularly important in today’s uncertain and complex environment. Standing on this foundation, the coach's responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve
- Encourage client self-discovery
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
- Hold the client responsible and accountable

This process helps clients dramatically improve their outlook on life and work, while improving their leadership skills and maximizing their potential.

## How is Coaching Distinct from Other Service Professions?

Professional coaching focuses on setting goals, creating outcomes, and managing personal change. To understand coaching, it can be useful to distinguish it from other service professions.

- **Therapy:** *Therapists* heal pain, dysfunction, and conflict within an individual. The focus is on resolving difficulties from the *past* that effect individuals in the present, removing psychological barriers, and building self-understanding. *Therapists* help clients understand the “*why*,” and bring them to effective functioning. *Coaches* help clients create strategies and solutions to achieve personal and professional goals and realize their fullest potential. The focus is on the *present* and emphasizes action, accountability, and follow-through to achieve desired outcomes. *Coaches* help clients focus on the “*how*,” and move them from effective functioning to optimal functioning.
- **Consulting:** Individuals and organizations retain *consultants* for their expertise to diagnose problems, prescribe, and at times implement solutions. In *coaching*, the assumption is that individuals and teams are capable of generating their own solutions, with the coach supplying supportive, self-discovery-based approaches.
- **Mentoring:** *Mentors* are experts who provide wisdom and guidance based on their own personal experience. *Mentors* provide advice and counsel. *Coaches* do not give advice or counsel. Instead, clients set and reach their own objectives. Often, *mentors* are content experts while the *coach’s* expertise is the coaching process itself which applies across multiple content areas.
- **Training:** *Trainers* or instructors set objectives for their programs. *Training* follows a linear learning path and an established curriculum. *Coaches* ask clients to establish their own objectives with guidance from the coach. *Coaching* utilizes a variety of techniques without one set curriculum to achieve defined goals.

- **Athletic Coaching:** *Athletic coaches* use their specialized knowledge and experience of the *sport* to direct the behavior and skills of individuals. They focus on skills that are being executed incorrectly or poorly and competition. In contrast, *professional coaches* use their knowledge and experience to work with *individuals* so they can effectively *determine their own direction* and skills to develop. They focus on identifying opportunities for development based on an individual's strengths and capabilities, and work for a win-win outcome.

### **An Example: Learning to Ride a Bicycle**

If you want to learn how to ride a bicycle, here is what to expect if you hire each professional:

**A therapist** will help you discover what is holding you back from riding the bike. He/she will go back into your past to discover what kind of experience you had at an early age with a bicycle.

**A consultant** will bring you a bicycle manual, tell you everything you ever wanted to know about how a bicycle works, depart, and then return six months later to see how you are doing.

**A mentor** will share his/her experiences of bike riding and the lessons he/she learned. The mentor will bestow all his/her wisdom about bicycle riding to you.

**A trainer** will teach you how to ride a bike and an **athletic coach** will perfect your bike riding skills, enhance your physical condition for optimal bike riding, and prepare you to win a race.

**A coach** will help you get up on the bicycle and then encourage, endorse, acknowledge, and support you while running alongside until you feel comfortable enough to go it alone.

### **Summary Chart**

<b>Learning Method</b>	<b>Coaching</b>	<b>Mentoring</b>	<b>Counseling</b>
<b>The Question:</b>	How?	What?	Why?
<b>The Focus:</b>	The Present	The Future	The Past
<b>Aim:</b>	Improving Skills and Performance	Developing and Committing to Learning Goals	Overcoming Psychological Barriers/Resolving Emotional Problems and Interpersonal Conflicts
<b>Goal:</b>	Raising Competence/ Maximizing Potential	Opening Horizons	Building Self-Understanding