

# Introduction To What Coaching Is (and what it isn't)

## What is coaching?

International Coaching Federation (ICF) defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

Coaching is a client-driven process. 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

The coaching process helps clients improve their outlook on work and life, while improving their leadership skills and unlocking their potential.

## How is coaching distinct from other service professions?

Professional coaching focuses on setting goals, creating outcomes and managing personal change. Sometimes it's helpful to understand coaching by distinguishing it from other personal or organizational support professions.

- **Therapy:** Therapy deals with healing pain, dysfunction and conflict within an individual or in relationships. The focus is often on resolving difficulties arising from the past that hamper an individual's emotional functioning in the present, improving overall psychological functioning, and dealing with the present in more emotionally healthy ways. Coaching, on the other hand, supports personal and professional growth based on self-initiated change in pursuit of specific actionable outcomes. Coaching is future-focused, and the coaching relationship emphasizes action, accountability and follow-through.

- **Consulting:** Individuals or organizations retain consultants for their expertise. While consulting approaches vary widely, the assumption is the consultant will diagnose problems and prescribe and, sometimes, implement solutions. With coaching, the assumption is that individuals or teams are capable of generating their own solutions, with the coach supplying supportive, discovery-based approaches and frameworks.

- **Mentoring:** A mentor is an expert who provides wisdom and guidance based on his or her own experience. Mentoring may include advising, counseling and coaching. The coaching process does not include advising or counseling, and focuses instead on individuals or groups setting and reaching their own objectives.

- **Training:** Training programs are based on objectives set out by the trainer or instructor. Though objectives are clarified in the coaching process, they are set by the individual or team being coached, with guidance provided by the coach. Training also assumes a linear learning path that coincides with an established curriculum. Coaching is less linear, without a set curriculum.

- **Athletic Development:** Though sports metaphors are often used, professional coaching is different from sports coaching. The athletic coach is often seen as an expert who guides and directs the behavior of individuals or teams based on his or her greater experience and knowledge. Professional coaches possess these qualities, but their experience and knowledge of the individual or team determines the direction. Additionally, professional coaching does not focus on behaviors that are being executed poorly or incorrectly. Instead, the focus is on identifying opportunity for development based on individual strengths and capabilities.

## Why should I partner with a coach?

If you want to take advantage of an opportunity or challenge, feel “stuck” on the path to achieving your goals or simply believe there is something more to discover in your personal or professional life, partnering with a professional coach could benefit you. Unlock your potential.

Coaching clients who responded to the 2017 ICF Global Consumer Awareness Study reported positive coaching impacts including:

- Improved communication skills
- Increased self-esteem/self-confidence
- Increased productivity
- Optimized individual/team work performance
- Improved work/life balance
- Increased well-being
- Improved business management strategies
- Expanded professional career opportunities

The International Coach Federation (ICF) seeks to advance the art, science and practice of professional coaching and exists to lead the global advancement of the coaching profession. Learn more about ICF at [Coachfederation.org](http://Coachfederation.org).