



## WHAT IS A COACH?

I've noticed that many people remain unclear as to what the role of a life coach is in a person's life, so I thought to offer an opinion based on my professional experience. First and foremost, a coach is not your friend, although he or she can feel like a best friend at times, a true confidant... who can hold you with such confidence as to *who you really are*. Some of us are blessed with a family member, friend, teacher or colleague who can do that, but such people are rare.

In my early training to be a certified coach, I challenged the school's leader with a pointed question... Isn't coaching merely the commodification of friendship? The person smiled and did not address my narrow-minded opinion masked as a question. The last eight years of earning my fulltime living through coaching has given me my answer: Coaching is not friendship for sale. Honesty, openness and willingness must be present between the client and coach, and often an exquisite friendliness and trust arise during sessions, but if a coach has chosen to become your friend then they aren't much of a coach. You should fire them, and become friends.

A coach is not a consultant, although I have met many consultants who *think* they are coaches. Consultants are hired for their particular expertise—coaches support a client to find hidden, often repressed talents and/or refine their current skill. And a coach is not your Master Sergeant but certain people respond and grow with such an approach.

Hiring a coach is about your healing and transformation, about a journey of personal change. A coach is someone who has been taught how to listen effectively and how to ask profound questions. Typically a life coach is someone with a ton of life experience, a diverse and well-honed skill set, and a keen ability to quickly see others' potential along with the inner and outer obstacles to accessing such potential. Coaches are professionally trained individuals who are not swimming in the rapids of your life... men and women who can support you to learn to navigate more honestly, effectively and efficiently at home, work, and in community.

Coaches support you to live into your potential.

There is a lot of confusion between the roles of therapist and life coach. A life coach is not a therapist. A coach will not sit and endlessly listen to your story of who you think you are, based on some memory of this or that achievement and/or trauma. Some coaches, awareness coaches like me, if invited, will plumb and walk with you into the deeper dimensions of your being, but if you can't learn, grow and initiate right action from what you discover, then it's back to therapy for you. Because awareness coaches are not afraid of their own pain, they are not afraid of your pain, and can be of use to you.

Some people who come to coaching want to be re-parented... to learn to give themselves what their parents did not give them. Such work is tricky, often messy, and I assert that it is best left to skilled therapists. Some coaches can do this work if they have had that particular training. Many coaches *think* that they have this qualification but they haven't fully ingested the re-parenting work.

Coaching is about transformation.

Coaching helps a person move beyond human condition to human capacity. Coaches help you prepare your soil for the seeds of change to grow. Most coaches work with the performance aspect of change. Awareness coaches do that too, and they support and teach you how to accept change as Grace gives it to you, and to behave differently when Grace doesn't arrive on your timetable—awareness coaches wake you up by showing you your obstacles to Grace's healing and transformation. I find that aspect of my work particularly rewarding both personally and professionally.

If you have a coach and you're *only* working on your performance at work, I suggest you are merely doing a superficial inquiry. Such inquiries are tantamount to clients changing deck chairs on a ship called Titanic... inevitably there is no healing or transformation—no real change, no real skill development and things head south. You sink.

Most of the people I work with are business leaders... CEOs, executives, small cap business owners, corporate managers, scientists, software architects, coaches and management consultants... Mature, successful people looking to refine their game. They're often also seeking a deeper dimension of their being, and, sometimes they're people who've found out that the beliefs, behaviors and skills that served them well during the first half of their life no longer work.

A coach can help you develop new skills.

I work mostly with people 40+, as men and women younger than forty typically haven't yet suffered enough to be honest, open and willing to actually embrace inner and outer change. Before that age, most people continue to project their problems onto others and the world. They are not yet ready to change, but I've coached a few exceptions.

A sub-role I will engage within the role of coach is akin to a medieval court jester or "wise fool" to the King. The wise fool involves working with men and, infrequently, with women in high profile, dynamic, and influential positions of power in our culture. Such people sometimes employ coaches as advisors—"a safe person to run things by." Because I see that sub-role's inherent value to the client, I will participate for a time, but I also insist that clients also initiate and begin to get to know one nonprofessional person, with whom they can have honest and open conversation. I work mostly with men in this regard. The isolation of men in their "caves" remains a rampant and debilitating disease. That is why I started [www.arjunaconference.com](http://www.arjunaconference.com) to help men—especially for leaders in the corporate world, small cap business owners, scientists and innovators—understand and increase their capacity for intimacy and sharing, regardless of their "position" in our culture.

People come to coaching for many reasons.

Unfortunately, many people who initially seek a coach really just want a massage. I enjoy a good massage myself, but massage is not coaching. It goes without saying, but I will say it anyways—I care much more about whether my clients deepen their self awareness and achieve their goals than if they like me, and if they like me that's nice too, but I still won't give you a massage.

I know that the better coaches are women and men who are dispassionate (compassion without attachment) when it comes to their clients' inner growth and goal achievement. As a coach, when I find myself getting attached to whether a client is achieving his or her goals, I immediately know that I've gone off-track—*power* is with the *client* in the coaching relationship. They are fully responsible for their own growth and goals. The coach is supportive and collaborates to create a plan, then watches like a loving hawk, but the coach is *not* on the playing field. I assert the best coach is one who angers and/or annoys a client at least a couple times a month, someone who makes you question, inquire, think, reflect, be with and begin to smell the dirty diapers you continue to lug around. We all do this... that's why I used to have four support people in my life (I had a big load), and am blessed with a solid team around me now... I want to stay on my game and I want to be who I truly am... a passionate, loving, creative man who cares deeply about people.

I serve people privately and they pay me directly, and I also coach people through their organizations, "corporate clients." When working in an organization, I meet the individual and/or team members either at work, or preferably they come to my studio, or an off-site retreat location. We look immediately at the presenting situation, the overall dynamic and business challenges and goals, desired personal and/or team competencies, then set quantifiable benchmarks for success, and allow their whole life to show up for the coaching. Engaging a coaching relationship is *not* easy but it can be real and fruitful, if you show up for yourself and do the work.

Think about the very best coach you ever had in grade or high school or college... maybe you were on a sports team, or it was best do with your music, or the chess club, or an art form... something you really cared about, and try to remember the coach and/or teacher who helped you develop the talent into a skill and grow as a person... Hire a life or business coach like that person.