

An Invitation to Engage your Personal Professional Coach

The International Coach Federation defines the coaching experience, for business and academic executives this way:

"Professional Coaching is an ongoing partnership that helps clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Through the process of coaching, clients deepen their learning, improve their performance, and enhance their quality of life."

Then they go on to describe what happens in each session:

In each meeting, the client chooses the focus of conversations, while the coach listens and contributes observations and questions. This interaction creates clarity and moves the client into action. Coaching accelerates the client's progress by providing greater focus and awareness of choice. Coaching concentrates on where clients are today and what they are willing to do to get to where they want to be tomorrow.

In most phone sessions, lasting from 30-40 minutes, three or four times each month, now some 5000 coaches are meeting with their clients across North America each month. (Only a small percentage of coaching sessions are conducted in face-to-face conversations.)

Most clients stay in coaching for a period of nine months, and then take a break. Some enter with a view to resolving some particular situation that is especially painful, and continue past the short-term resolution for additional support.

This is not therapy, and is not a substitute for therapy. It is a highly sophisticated form of mentoring, and the benefits to the client are many:

- Clarity of both thoughts and feelings
- Clarity of facts from opinions
- Clarification of two apparently contradictory and mutually exclusive end results
- Clarification of personal values and business values
- Clarification between personal and business values, if and when there is a conflict
- Clarification of the potential implications of a proposed decision
- Rehearsal of a presentation, or an especially contentious meeting
- Rehearsal of a new tactic or strategy
- Rehearsal of a new perspective to the business philosophy
- Introduction to the layers of meaning of words, body movements and silences
- Introduction to the meanings of the concept of culture, including corporate culture, community culture, provincial culture and national culture
- Introduction to the culture of innovation
- Re-introduction to self, through the experiences of how others see us
- Re-introduction to our dreams and aspirations and our hopes

This last benefit seems so "cliché", but there is a genuine vacuum in the perceptions of many leaders between their personal hopes and dreams and the way they spend their time each working day and hour.

In our coaching sessions, we are motivated by two or three axioms, or principles, without losing sight of the individual(s) in the session.

Every person is perceived as a healthy, responsible and gifted creator of his/her life and person.

As coaches, we consider it a privilege to be invited to share in each person's journey. Not only do we respect the confidentiality of the guest to whom we have been invited to be temporary 'host', but we also are privileged to be co-explorers and co-creators with our guest of his/her adventure.

Some of our clients merely need to know that their perceptions and feelings and thoughts easily pass a "reality check".

Others are opening to the prospect of not having to live their lives in a solitary silo of independence and exclusively rugged individualism and are not surrendering their power or their individuality by engaging in the coaching process.

Some clients enter coaching because they do not know, or cannot see, any hope, for the moment. We agree with Jim Douglas, theologian and writer, who answered Joanna Macy's question, "*What do you substitute for hope?*" this way:

"Possibilities...possibilities...you can't predict, just make space for them. There are so many.' That too is waiting, active waiting—moving out on the fog-bound trail, though you cannot see the way ahead."

(From Sacred Sorrows, p. 125, eds. John E. Nelson and Andrea Nelson)

Some of our clients are "actively waiting" while they give active consideration to many possibilities, without knowing what is out there on the fog-bound trail. As coaches, we are more than willing to "accompany" their active waiting, without judgement, without prodding them into action, without impatience. Talking with a stranger is often a way to "begin to really listen to ourselves".

There are no hidden agendas hanging over the dialogue and there is no reason for the coach to hold back on the questions or the observations s/he makes.

There is also no reason to be with a coach with whom there is not a good "fit", not that there is no room for being nudged, pushed, tested and even challenged in a healthy, pro-active manner, but that the process is one in which both are engaged, to which both are committed and in which both are free to negotiate.

Setting the agenda for a coaching session, of course, is the prerogative and responsibility of the client. And then, within the conversation, each time there is a possible action for which the client wishes to be held accountable, s/he can agree or disagree to be held accountable to take that action.

Some coaches have clients who enter a session saying, "*I don't want to work on anything today; I just want you to provide safe and silent space for me to be in with you.*" And that is fine with the coach, including this coach.

While there is clear evidence that approximately 80% of current coaches are female, there is also evidence that more and more clients are male.

What coaches are not!

Coaches are not rescuers or enablers for being stuck and for refusing to take responsibility for oneself. Coaches are not easily engaged in a process that is not working for the client. All coaches agree that both client and coach will "know" when the sessions are not working for the client. Listening to my own experience and that of other coaches, we agree that there are times when coaches need to recommend to a client that s/he find another coach,

who might be more suitable to the client's needs.

So if the phone and/or the Internet have eliminated geography as an issue for those seeking coaching, there is only the question of the costs involved.

Free First Session/Costs

At The Acorn Centre, we would like to offer to anyone seeking a coach a free first session of up to one hour, either in person, or by phone. If both coach and prospective client are comfortable with the session, then we work out an agreement for a first month. If two sessions of 40 minutes are requested, the fee is \$200 per month. Three sessions cost \$250 per month. Four sessions cost \$300 per month. These numbers apply in both Canada and the U.S. American clients pay in U.S. currency.

Biography

After careers in education, marketing, journalism, business consulting* and community development, during which I was actively engaged in a daily, virtually hourly process of "coaching" individuals in coffee shops, on buses and airlines, in city parks and in their offices and businesses. I feel very comfortable and confident that if any sessions together don't work for you, they won't work for me.

I have been advocate, coach, mentor, and advisor to middle and senior executives in education, in health care, in industry. I have graduated from three different Canadian universities, first in English and History, then in Educational Administration and more recently in theology.

Theoretical Framework

If you have an interest in our theoretical perspectives, we are pleased to share them here. We have a strong interest in and sensitivity to the teachings of James Hillman, whose books *Revisoning Psychology* and *The Soul's Code* help us to a large extent in our work. We have also a strong interest in the work of Carl Jung, especially in the Persona/Shadow aspects of his work.

While we recognize and respect the reality that we live in a world where empiricism and positivism dominate much of the work of the academic community, including psychology and the social sciences, we are also conscious of our need for some way of connecting to our cultural history. We respect and reference the writing of John Ralston Saul, *The Unconscious Civilization*, and *Equilibrium*. We also make frequent use of Peter Senge's, *The Learning Organization*.

In our search for windows to understanding the patterns of our lives, we believe that Hillman's recollecting the archetypes has been, and continues to be, very helpful. More specifically, we are convinced that psychology has lost sight of the soul, or the psyche, through an inordinate emphasis on diagnostics and disease, and we believe that all aspects of each person's biography are helpful and creative in helping the pilgrimage to be fulfilling and rewarding.

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* Licensed Consultant/Trainer in Technologies for Creating™