

Finding the right coach

A short, practical guide to selecting a coach



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Introduction

This booklet is for coachees who want to find a coach. It is a supplement to our book *'Get Ready for Coaching'* and is specifically designed to help you select the right coach.

Research suggests that the success of any coaching programme is strongly influenced by:

- The degree to which coachees are prepared for coaching
- The clarity of their coaching goals
- Working with the right coach

Why is the coach so important?

When the coach is the right one for you, the relationship gets established quickly and a deep level of trust is formed. This leads to:

- Increased comfort in discussing difficult topics
- Confidence to talk freely and honestly
- Deeper levels of discussion leading to insights and change
- A feeling of strong support as you try new things out

So, it's worth taking the time to make sure that you've got the right coach.

The initial meeting

An initial meeting with potential coaches (2 or 3 is common) is often part of a selection processes. This is a good opportunity to assess the likelihood of a successful working relationship. Many coaches refer to this meeting as the 'rapport' or 'chemistry' meeting.

There can be a temptation to want to impress the coach or to project a positive image – it's human nature. However, it is very important to be yourself, for several reasons:

- It gives the coach a much better understanding of who they are going to be working with and the main objectives
- Initial rapport is difficult to build where there is a lack of authenticity
- If you start the relationship holding back or being less than open and honest, it will be hard to create deep trust later on

Initial meeting – questions for coaches

Some useful questions are provided here with spaces to add your own. Please feel free to photocopy them.

Coach:..... Date of meeting:.....

Coaching experience

- Based on what I have told you about my objectives, what sort of things might you suggest to help me?
- What principles or beliefs do you hold about coaching?
- Can you describe how you have worked with people in the past with similar requirements or circumstances?
- What coaching needs have you been particularly successful at supporting?
- What coaching needs do you consider to be outside your range of experience or skill?

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Technical competence

- What coaching qualifications do you have?
- What are your preferred assessment techniques?
- Can you describe the typical progression through a coaching assignment?
- How do you continue to develop your skills?
- What arrangements do you have for supervision?

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Coaching relationship

- How would you describe your coaching style ?
- Can you give me examples of when you have challenged coaching clients?
- What sort of support, if any, do you provide between coaching sessions?
- How do you structure review sessions?
- What sort of people do you most enjoy working with?

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Use the initial meeting to ask all the questions that matter to you – a good coach will expect and welcome questions and will be stimulated by interested enquiries.

Do ask open ended questions – not ones that will give you a simple and uninformative Yes or No answer.

Do take notes if you are seeing several coaches. It can be a valuable memory jogger.

Is the coach right for you?

So, you may have met several coaches and had useful exploratory conversations. Now you need to decide who is the best coach for you.

The choice may be immediate and obvious. If not, a good approach is to listen to your instincts regarding rapport but also validate the choice by considering the more tangible qualities such as competence, professionalism and experience.

The questions below may help to guide your reflections:

- Did the meeting leave you feeling excited and stimulated or did you feel a little disappointed or flat?
- Was conversation easy and comfortable or was it stilted?
- Was there evidence of humour – and if so was it similar to your own?
- Did the coach listen to your questions and check that each had been answered satisfactorily?
- Was the coach at ease with your questions without seeming defensive at any point?
- Did the coach ask you questions – and seem genuinely interested in your answers?
- Was the coach authentic when responding or did you get a sense of a technique that was tried and tested?
- How similar is the coach to you? If similar, is that going to give you what you need and want?

If none of the coaches that you have spoken to seem to be right then ask to meet one or two others. It's very important to be clear in your feedback so that efforts can be re-directed using that information.

Spotting the less effective coach

Coaching, whilst growing fast in popularity, is unregulated. This inevitably means that there is a wide variety of skills and capabilities in the market. In other words there are excellent, good and not-so-good coaches. There are also a few bad coaches who not only waste time and money but can actually be damaging for an individual. As a result, organisations are now adopting more rigorous coach selection processes. However, even the strongest selection processes are not flawless which can result in some less effective coaches being found on your organisation's shortlist.

The table on the next page identifies some of the tell-tale signs, good and bad, that you should look out for when evaluating a potential coach.

Finding the right coach

What to look for during the initial meeting	
Good signs	Bad signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good eye contact • Confident and enthusiastic without being overpowering or intimidating • Able to talk about their coaching style and values • Listens carefully and checks their understanding • Shows genuine interest, asks follow-up questions • Understands the need to balance organisational demands and personal aspirations in the coaching process • Comfortable to talk about their coaching techniques, models and tools • Clear about their areas of expertise and their limitations • Uses some coaching techniques during your conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor first impression • Talks too much or too loudly • Interrupts, finishes your sentences, or starts to answer before you have finished speaking • Overly ingratiating • Domineering or overly directive • Unwilling to discuss their coaching style – plays the "expert" role • Not being perceptive to your reactions – not picking up cues • Mechanical or formulaic • Talks about solutions very quickly • Focuses solely on the organisation's requirements or your personal ones – not both. • Uncomfortable with silence • Defensive about experience, qualifications or supervision

Final Thoughts

This booklet is intended to help you, the coachee, to find the right coach so that you get the most from your coaching experience.

Our book *'Get Ready for Coaching'* is an excellent guide to preparing to work with a coach. It explains exactly what you can expect from a coaching relationship and provides practical, concise advice about how to get the most from coaching.

Remember:

- Good coaching can be life-changing and extremely powerful. It can enable a rapid development of your skills and abilities and provide valuable insights that will serve you in other situations. Many people who experience this also report that they, in turn, are better coaches to their employees
- Mediocre coaching is an expensive investment with limited benefits and results. Your time is valuable, and if you only make small changes you may have been better off reading a good self-help book!
- Bad coaching can be a waste of time and money and at worst can damage individuals

Enjoy finding the right coach and best of luck with your coaching programme.

About the author

Caroline Lark is the Managing Director of Talent for Growth Ltd. The company works internationally, and across private and public sectors, helping clients to develop leaders and build high performing teams.

Her *'Get Ready'* series of books aims to prepare leaders to get the most from a range of development opportunities.

For more information please visit www.talentforgrowth.com

Other publications by Talent for Growth:

Get Ready for Coaching

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