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Executive, Political
& Spiritual Life
Coaching

COACHING JOURNEY

by Wayne Caskey

Many people ask me what is coaching like? How does it work? Is it like therapy? What can I expect? Are there stages along the way? How will I know when I'm done?

I've dealt with these questions, not only as a coach but also as a client, since I've had two coaches myself over the past five years.

Coaching is a chance for self-exploration, to use resources you may never knew you had, to design a life you've always wanted. There may be certain topics which bring you to coaching, like time management, organization, leadership, delegation or personal or professional relationship building. But what keeps you in coaching is a transformational sense, that I'm not the same person I was when I began, that I have new disciplines, that new and different opportunities have opened up to me.

This process is possible because coaching lets the client construct the agenda. It's about how you want to improve your life and what you're willing to do to get there. After you've decided that, then it's about being held accountable by a coach who is both supportive and challenging, not letting you get away with less than your very best.

It isn't like therapy, because it focuses on the present and the future, not the past. I've had clients who have pursued both simultaneously and found them not only helpful but mutually reinforcing.

So, how does this process play out in specific cases?

SHORT TERM COACHING

I've had two clients who have coached for only four months. One was primarily concerned with which direction to go after a job termination—toward consulting or toward another job. As he listed the values by which he ran his life it became apparent that his path was clearly in the consulting area and we concluded.

Another client, who came to coaching because of time management and organization issues, listed the main activities of her life which were between seventy and one hundred percent fun for her. She concluded the coaching and over the next six months eliminated all the activities that were less than seventy percent fun, totally changing her life.

INTERMEDIATE TERM COACHING

I've had two clients whose one to two-year coaching journey has ended with a focus on acquiring their own business. For one, it involved resigning his job, becoming a consultant, and then gradually coming to the conclusion that he wanted to own his own manufacturing operation. His steps had a lot to do with realizing that ownership would be where his values would be most fully realized.

The second client came to coaching knowing he wanted to make an acquisition. His process was looking at potential acquisitions in light of his long-held values. He tried on various acquisitions for size, finally settling on one which fulfills these values and where the setting fits his finances, his interests and his talents.

LONG TERM COACHING

Four current clients whose coaching relationships are in their fourth to sixth year have remarkable similarities in how their lives have been transformed. What has occurred is *spaciousness* that each had not previously experienced, *inner power* to bring about major changes in their lives, and a sense of *joy* emanating from the depth and breadth of the fulfillment they have experienced.

- An M.D. client, having pretty well freed himself of the insurance company reimbursement game, shortened his work day without sacrificing revenue, and was able to devote more time to the foundation he established and to professional and personal travel.
- A CEO client, faced with his Company's contraction after years of expansion, incorporated strict financial discipline into his leadership style and the company's culture while retaining his very human, down-to-earth approach. He characterized himself after the successful contraction as "a man for all seasons."
- A Fortune 10 subsidiary COO client recently resigned his position. He had realized over time that his values, which were not the values of his organization, were more important to him. Identification with a name organization and excess money meant nothing in his value structure when compared to the bureaucratic stifling of initiative he had to endure.
- After three years of coaching, an entrepreneur realized his dream of hiking the Appalachian Trail. He is reordering his life so that multi-month wilderness trips can be a regular part of his life.

TAKING TIME OUT

Both the intermediate and long term clients profiled here took time out from coaching, anywhere from two to eight months. They used this time to apply coaching techniques to themselves, challenging themselves to be satisfied only with those scenarios which fit them best and really

did fulfill their dreams. When the intermediate clients came up with acquisition candidates that seemed to fill the bill, they returned for a coaching session as a way to double check their inclinations. The long term clients came up with new issues that caused them to resume.

CHANGING COACHES

After four years with my coach I began to get restless. As a coach, I knew that there are periods in any coaching relationship when things drag, when it appears that no progress is being made. In these situations, projecting one's inactivity onto the coach is very easy to do. But this was different. My coach had gotten me to a different place where I felt my focus was such that he couldn't help me anymore. So I found another coach, more appropriate for me at this time, and changed, acknowledging my past coach for all he had done for me.

END OF THE ROAD OR LIFE'S JOURNEY?

The journeys of two of my clients serves as a contrast on this issue. One felt his vision for his company was not shared by the family that owned the company. His frustration led him finally to quit and become a consultant to a number of companies in the same general industry. As time went on, the confidence he gained ultimately resulted in his concluding he did not need coaching on a regular basis

Another client has expressed the thought that, for him, the personal and professional benefits of coaching are such that he plans to pursue them on a life-long basis.

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The process that clients go through changes from listening to the coach and his or her questions to listening to themselves expressing who they are. Coaching allows clients to hear more clearly the "messages from me to myself" and act upon them, filling their lives with spaciousness, inner power and joy.

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