

Understanding Life Coaching How and Why It Works

Written by Noel Posus, Director of askacoach.com

Overview

Life Coaching first appeared in the personal and professional development market in 1980, with Thomas Leonard being the first practitioner to call himself a Life Coach. Since then, coaching has spread around the world, and tens of thousands of coaches of various types offer a wide variety of specialist coaching services.

Coaching was born from a number of fields of research and industries including humanistic psychology, counselling, adult education, organisational development and corporate training, consulting, mentoring, sports coaching and the rise of the human potential movement of the 1960's. The "toolkit" used by today's coaches is made up of information, research, models and strategies which have been developed from these various other professional services for over seventy years.

The term "coaching" was first coined in 1926, and the first published paper on the subject was published in 1937, with over 300 academic papers produced since then. The notion that life coaching is an "American fad" can easily be disputed when we explore the number of citations of clinical study and evidence within the scientific and academic communities.

Adding to that, thousands of articles have been produced for publication in journals and magazines for leadership, management, healthcare, sports, the arts, parenting, education and of course in publications, radio and television for the general public.

Currently, the coaching industry is benefiting from the new fields of coaching psychology and positive psychology, where clients are worked with using theoretically grounded and scientifically validated techniques to help clients reach goals in their personal and professional lives. This approach is called evidence based, and is the foundation for the next phase of growth in the coaching industry.

The research and the application of the findings are focused on human change and the enhancement of performance and wellbeing.

Coaches can provide assistance across a number of general areas, such as:

- Identifying goals and how to achieve them
- Enhancing self-leadership and leadership of others
- Improving career growth
- Changing habits related to healthy living
- Increasing sense of self-worth and confidence, in order to achieve their objectives
- Establishing, growing and maintaining successful relationships
- Learning new skills from goal-achievement through to communication
- Overcoming barriers, including self-limiting thinking and habits
- Raising self awareness in order to make more confident and positive choices

There are also a large number of highly-specialised coaching practitioners in the areas of:

- Health & Wellness
- Education
- Relationships
- Career
- Spirituality
- Social, Community and Altruism
- Finance and Wealth

There are as many different “styles” of coaching as there are individuals to assist. This is because the coach is focused on the needs of the client, what they want to achieve, how they learn best, how they may need support and/or challenge, and what tools and strategies may be the most effective for the client. The coach adapts to the needs of the individual, versus from their own preferred style of coaching.

This means that coaching is nearly always customised to the unique situation and needs at any given time.

However, there are also varying definitions in the academic, coaching practitioner and general public perspectives, of what coaching is. These definitions can be significantly different, and sometimes even in conflict with each other.

Definitions of Coaching

One simple way of defining coaching is that the coach works with a client to assist them raise awareness, make decisions and modify behaviour or take action. The client sets the agenda of what they want to achieve, and the coach facilitates a process by which the client can achieve their desired outcome.

The coach doesn't provide the solution, give instructions or direct the client on a course of action to take. Instead, the coach uses a number of tools and strategies to achieve the following:

- o Clarifying objectives in a specific, measurable, achievable, relevant way including time frames for the goal
- o Identifying the inspiration and/or motivation behind the objective
- o Defining the client's core values, or in other words, what's most important to them and therefore is the basis for decision making
- o Exploring, and sometimes challenging the beliefs, attitudes and choices of a client
- o Inventorying the strengths, skills, potential and opportunities
- o Identifying potential obstacles and limitations and co-designing solutions for them, before and/or as they occur
- o Reframing, or re-designing, self-limiting belief systems into positive, realistic and relevant new models of thinking
- o Teaching and sharing personal and professional development information, tools, techniques and strategies and working through various application options relevant to the client
- o Creating an action plan for goal achievement
- o Celebrating accomplishments, both the milestone moments as well as the end result
- o Supporting the individual throughout the process in a non-judgemental, unbiased and solution focused approach
- o Encouraging the client to acknowledge their achievements and skills and inspire them to continue their development journey

Below are some more useful definitions of coaching along with a few explanations and further clarification.

"Coaches work with individuals and groups to achieve their desired outcomes. We do this through a combination of sophisticated training, expanding awareness and designing supportive environments which inspire growth."

Dave Buck, CEO – Coachville

This is a very important definition of coaching as it breaks down previously upheld beliefs that coaches only ask a series of questions to help the client achieve their own outcomes. Although this questioning approach is very much a part of coaching, coaches typically access many more tools in the process.

For example, coaches provide training to the client in a number of areas as may be relevant to the client's need, such as how to set and achieve goals, how to change habits of thinking or behaviour, and time management skills (more appropriately called "schedule choice management").

Additionally, the coach often assists the client to explore all parts of their life and not just the environment where their goal is focused on. For example, if a client presents with some rough goals around career, it may also be appropriate to explore complementary environments of knowledge, family, social or financial.

There are ten core environments that life coaches explore with clients to ensure all environments are supporting the client, as much as reasonable and realistic for them to do so. These environments are:

- o Health – mental, physical and emotional
- o Knowledge and Learning
- o Social
- o Financial
- o Family
- o Partner
- o The Partner Within – or the relationship with oneself
- o Spirituality (also considered a component of health)
- o Career and/or Business
- o Giving to Others
- o Giving to Self (attending to one's own needs versus simply the relationship with oneself)

Another definition is:

"Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them."

Timothy Gallwey, Author of *The Inner Game* series of books

Gallwey's definition comes from his background in sports coaching which he used to develop his "inner game" concept across numerous fields from sport to music to the workplace. His reference to performance is a key component of how coaching is defined today.

Coaching is predominately thought of as a model for increasing or enhancing performance, whereas counselling is often perceived as being about progress. To be clear, coaching is also about progress, but in most cases progress toward performance achievement objectives.

The sporting coach analogy is often one of the best ways of describing the frameworks coaches operate from – to drive maximum performance of an individual in the areas they want to perform highly in.

Imagine how a sports coach trains, challenges, motivates and inspires an athlete or a team. The players are responsible for their own performance, and the coach trains, challenges, motivates, inspires and celebrates their achievements with them, and all along encouraging them to develop these same skills for themselves.

Types Of Coaching

There are a number of major areas of coaching. Here are some brief descriptions.

- **Life Coaching:** The generalist Life Coach assists people in achieving objectives and greater satisfaction in all areas of their life, including work/life balance. All forms of coaching at one point or another include a generalist life coach approach.
- **Life Cycle Coaching:** A Life Cycle Coach assists people going through major transitions in life, ranging from teenagers growing into young adults, university students entering the job market, new relationships, ending relationships (including divorce), major life redesigns (like a sea or tree change) and retirement. There are many transitions that one might go through and these coaches specialise in navigating those changes.
- **Career Coaching:** A Career Coach focuses works almost exclusively with individuals who are either considering or going through a career transition of some sort. This could include developing the confidence required for interviewing, identifying new career directions, improving performance to become more attractive for promotion opportunities, working through the special needs of a relocation or transfer, returning to the workforce after an extended leave, and so on. Career Coaches often use assessment and profiling tools to assist their clients.

- **Health & Wellness Coaching:** As health and wellness management is one of the biggest reasons why an individual may seek out a coach, it is also one of the biggest specialty areas within the coaching industry. There are many different sub-types of Health and Wellness Coaches, and in most cases they work as part of an overall “Wellness Team” with their clients. The team may also include the client’s doctor, personal trainer, nutritionist, naturopath and other wellness specialists. In this team environment, the coach often focuses on identifying the future-focused goals of the individual and supports them in leading their own wellness team.
- **Business Coaching:** Business Coaches have a specialist understanding of how business operates and how business can achieve their objectives through successful self and team leadership. The coach often works with the business owners to get clear on the objectives, and coaches them around how best to lead their team to achieve the results. Many of these businesses are small to medium businesses where coaching the leaders becomes a combination of life coaching for them, and business coaching for the business.
- **Workplace Coaching:** A workplace coach, or team of coaches, work with organisations, or teams within an organisation, to achieve very specific business outcomes. In most cases, the process begins with a thorough exploration of the scope of work, desired objectives and potential strategies for achievement. Then a customised programme is designed and the coaches work specifically within that programme, coaching all members of the team. There are many variations in this field and typically requires extensive experience in coaching programme design.
- **Executive Coaching** – This field of coaching has become one of the most successful sub-sections of the industry in the past decade. Executive Coaching is almost entirely focused on leadership skills. The coach works with the leader on identifying their current leadership skills and strengths, works through solutions for areas not yet a core strength, and helps the client set and achieve objectives in both self-leadership and leadership of others. In some cases, the Executive Coach may also work with the leader on designing and implementing a succession plan, so that the leader is freed up to pursue their next leadership challenge or objective.

There are many other specialty types of coaching, such as:

- o Spirituality Coaching
- o Parenting Coaching
- o Coaching For Teens
- o Coaching for the Non-Profit Sector
- o Corporate Social Responsibility Coaching
- o Recovery Coaching for those who've recently finished a recovery programme
- o Coaching for those going through a legal matter, to support them emotionally through the process

In all of these areas, the coach either has a specialist background in the area, including the appropriate credentials and qualifications, or they work as part of an overall team of other specialists.

For example, in Recovery Coaching, the coach works with qualified recovery specialists, counsellors and medical professionals in alcohol, drug and other addiction areas, and helps the clients establish long term goals to get on with the rest of their life once the initial recovery intervention process has helped the client get to a stage where long-term goals can realistically be explored. It is a team approach, and the coach is never replacing, or performing the services, of the qualified recovery practitioner.

For any type of coaching, it may be important for the client to interview their coach to truly understand their areas of expertise, credentials and qualifications. Additionally, it may be helpful to explore how working with the coach can be part of an overall team approach. For example, if the client's name is Claire, the coach could be assisting her to create "Claire's Team" which supports her in all of her objectives and special need areas.

Coaching versus Counselling And Other Helping Professions

These definitions, and those similar to it, tend to identify that coaches typically work with people who are feeling functional now and simply want to achieve greater performance. They also indicate that the clients do not self-identify a need for counselling or therapy. However, this is not always the case and therefore some definitions and descriptions about what other helping professionals do may be useful.

Many helping professions use the same, or similar, tools and resources, however the application and approach is often different, based on the needs of the individual and the skill sets of the professional.

- **Coaching:** Essentially, coaching focuses on the strengths and abilities of the client in a positive and affirming way, to assist them in achieving current and future goals. It is a solution-focused approach, and coaches are generally speaking, experts on individual change management. Coaches typically work with individuals who identify as fully functional and are seeking to increase their performance and general life effectiveness and satisfaction.
- **Counselling:** Counselling is often focused on working through particular issues which may be affecting the client's current sense of wellbeing. This can therefore also be past focused at first, to identify issues and potentially work through a healing process. It is also solution-focused in many cases. There are many types of counsellors, and many varying approaches, some of which far more resemble the positive and future focused coaching approach.
- **Psychology:** Psychology can be very pathology focused, or in other words, identifying issues, including disorders, and then designing treatment plans to assist the individual to either overcome, or more effectively manage issues and disorders. There is also a growing movement of positive psychology, which focuses on new ways of thinking and behaviour which are positive, future and prevention focused, specifically looking at the development of happiness in our everyday lives.
- **Psychiatry:** Psychiatrists are medical doctors, who can diagnose disorders and disease. They provide a service very similar to psychology and are also able to prescribe medication as part of the overall treatment programme.
- **Mentoring:** Mentoring has historically been focused on helping an individual by sharing the experience of someone who has already become successful in the area the individual is seeking assistance in. It can often include providing direction and advice. Today, we are seeing mentors using a more "coach-approach", meaning that they are providing less advice, and challenging the individual to achieve their own conclusions and solutions, while combining the mentor's topic expertise.

Most coaches maintain relationships with other helping professionals, including counsellors and psychologists. We do this for two reasons. First, for our own professional development and to work with individuals with specific expertise which we can learn from and share ideas. Second, as a referral network in which to better serve our clients.

In some client-coach relationships, an issue may come up which sits outside the coach's area of expertise or qualifications. In these situations, the coach will discuss with the client that the issue is not something the coach is capable or qualified to address. The coach will also ask the client how they would like to address the issue and if they are open to considering seeking out the assistance of another more qualified helping professional. In these cases the coach can assist the client further by making a referral.

Referrals are not endorsements or recommendations. The coach will sometimes provide a short list of referral professionals, or direct the client to a listing of professionals on the Internet. The coach will also often help the client research their own counsellor or other professional, first by helping the client be clear about what they are seeking the other professional for and the type of assistance they need and want, and then by supporting the client through the process of interviewing and selecting the professional.

Coaches sometimes work directly with the other professional, setting agreements about who is going to do what and to clarify boundaries and how to respond to the client's needs which respect all members of the team. This is of course only ever done with the client's expressed permission to do so. However, coaches and other professionals do not typically share information about the client back and forth with each other. The conversation is only about developing strategies that are client focused so that both the individual and team objectives are met.

The Research

Although there are more than 300 academic citations on the field of coaching over the past years, there has been admittedly a small amount compared to other disciplines.

However, the University of Sydney Coaching Psychology Department has been leading the global academic coaching community in developing clinical research to demonstrate the effectiveness of life coaching. These Australian pioneers include Dr Anthony Grant, Dr Michael Cavanagh as well as Dr Suzy Green and Dr L. G. Oades from the University of Wollongong.

The first empirical investigation of life coaching was performed by Dr Grant in 2003. That study utilised a cognitive behavioural, solution-focused model of coaching and provided preliminary evidence that evidence-based life coaching can enhance mental health, quality of life and goal attainment.

This research was followed up by the July 2006 published research paper called, "*Cognitive-behavioural, solution-focused life coaching: Enhancing goal striving, well-being and hope.*" The summary from that paper appears below.

"This study is the first controlled study completed on an evidence-based group life-coaching intervention. It provided evidence that a cognitive-behavioural, solution-focused life coaching group programme is effective in increasing goal striving, well-being and hope. The results also suggest that the gains can be maintained over time. It is suggested that the role of hope theory may explain increases in goal striving and well-being within a life coaching intervention for a non-clinical population. Life coaching programmes that utilise evidence-based techniques provide a framework for further research on psychological processes that occur in non-clinical populations who wish to make changes in their lives and enhance their positive psychological functioning."

To understand the above summary more fully, it may also be helpful to define how the construct of hope relates.

According to the report, "Hope theory consists of three cognitive components: goals, agency and pathways thoughts. Hope theory is based on the assumption that human actions are goal directed (Snyder, Michael & Cheavens, 1999).

To pursue goals, a person must perceive himself or herself as being able to generate one or several alternative routes to such goals (pathways) and also have the perceived capacity to utilise these routes to reach the desired goal (agency). It has been found that thinking about goals immediately triggers agentic and pathways thoughts that are both necessary for goal-directed behaviour. Thus helping individuals to articulate their goals may stimulate hope (Snyder et al., 1999).

Snyder claims that hope enhancement is best achieved by integration of solution-focused, narrative and cognitive-behavioural interventions with hope therapy designed to "help client in conceptualising clearer goals, producing numerous pathways to attainment, summoning the mental energy to maintain the goal pursuit and reframing insurmountable obstacles as challenges to be overcome" (Snyder, 2000). Coaching participants may utilise the cognitive-behavioural and solution-focused techniques, to increase both agentic and pathways thoughts during goal striving which will promote self-regulation and enhance generalisation of such skills over time, i.e. when overcoming future obstacles."

Another significant area of research related to coaching comes from the Positive Psychology movement, a rapidly growing sub-section of the psychology, and lead by Dr Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania in the USA.

According to the University of Pennsylvania website, "Positive Psychology is the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. This field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work and play.

Positive Psychology has three central concerns: positive emotions, positive individual traits, and positive institutions. Understanding positive emotions entails the study of contentment with the past, happiness in the present, and hope for the future. Understanding positive individual traits consists of the study of the strengths and virtues, such as the capacity for love and work, courage, compassion, resilience, creativity, curiosity, integrity, self-knowledge, moderation, self-control and wisdom. Understanding positive institutions entails the study of the strengths that foster better communities, such as justice, responsibility, civility, parenting, nurturance, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose and tolerance."

Some of the goals of Positive Psychology are to build a science that supports:

- Families and schools that allow children to flourish
- Workplaces that foster satisfaction and high productivity
- Communities that encourage civic engagement
- Therapists, coaches and other professionals, who identify and nurture their client's strengths
- The teaching of Positive Psychology
- Dissemination of Positive Psychology interventions in organisations and communities

Dr Seligman (University of Pennsylvania), Dr Nansook Park (University of Rhode Island) and Dr Christopher Peterson (University of Michigan) published their July-August 2005 paper, "*Positive Psychology Progress – Empirical Validation of Interventions*" in which some interesting findings which apply to life coaching were identified.

The term "happiness" can be defined into three distinct and better defined routes: (a) positive emotion and pleasure (the pleasant life); (b) engagement (the engaged life); and (c) meaning (the meaningful life). "Our recent research suggests that people reliably differ

according to the type of life that they pursue and, further, that the most satisfied people are those who orient their pursuits to all three, with the greatest weight carried by engagement and meaning.”

Seligman and his colleagues have been able to prove that a number of happiness supporting methodologies are clinically effective to increase happiness and decrease depressive symptoms from one to six months. These exercises included the following focus areas:

- o Gratitude
- o Identifying Signature Strengths
- o Using Signature Strengths
- o Identifying Good Things
- o You At Your Best

Furthermore, they have been able to show that combining a number of strategies, and when facilitated by a qualified and experienced coach or other professional, that the positive outcomes are quite likely to occur much faster and to be sustained longer.

Finally, there is also an amazing wealth of non-clinical methodologies and research being conducted, which combined with the scientific evidence-based tools, creates an amazing toolkit for coaches to work with to support our clients.

Methodologies And Tools

There are numerous methodologies and tools used by coaches, which work in most environments when well matched with the client’s needs. Here are some of the foundational tools with some brief descriptions.

GROW Model: The GROW Model is the cornerstone coaching structure used by most coaches in both life and business environments. It is made up of essentially four steps:

- o **G = Goal:** Setting both short and long-term goals and writing them down
- o **R = Reality:** Understanding the current situation, the reasons for the goal, assessing strengths and checking assumptions
- o **O = Options:** Brainstorming options, asking for alternative solutions, exploring the pros and cons of each so that the individual is prepared to make a decision
- o **W = Way Forward or What Next:** Creating an action plan, taking into account any obstacles and designing solutions for them in advance, identifying support systems and gaining a commitment to act

Solution-Focus: Based in Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), this approach is very future focused, where the coach and the client work to identify the vision of the ideal future, and then concentrate on designing goals, action plans and solutions to known and perceived obstacles. The coach will help the client assess, acknowledge and utilise their strengths and resources to achieve the result. Although the past may be explored, it is done primarily to identify skills and moments of achievement that have relevance to the current objective. The coach helps the client acknowledge their successful behaviours with past obstacles to help them overcome current ones.

Examples of the tools include "The Miracle Question" where the client is invited to imagine that they woke up tomorrow and their "miracle" has happened, and from that ideal vision, be able to identify the specific strategies to move from their current situation toward their ideal.

Scaling, exception and coping questions are also used to help assess skills, identify times when the client was successful, check assumptions and to acknowledge the resources a client has to see them through various situations successfully. Identifying and utilising the client's resources, such as social networks, are a very important part of the process.

Reality-Focus: This approach is based on Reality Therapy, which comes from Choice Theory, developed in the 1960s. It focuses on problem solving and the "here and now" of the client, and how to create a better future, instead of concentrating on the past. It emphasises making decisions, taking action and being in control of one's own life.

The coach facilitates a process where the client can discover what they really want, identify what they're doing now, what's working and what's not and to continue to make new decisions and demonstrate new or enhanced positive behaviours to reach the goal.

Reality Focus is a cognitive behaviour approach, meaning that it helps the client to be more aware of, and if necessary change, his or her thoughts and actions. It is centred on our five basic, genetically endowed needs, with the primary need, survival, being physical and all others being psychological.

- **Survival:** including food, clothing, nourishment, shelter, personal security
- **Connecting, Belonging, Love:** including groups as well as families or loved ones
- **Power:** including learning, achievement and feeling worthwhile and winning

- o **Freedom:** including independence, autonomy, and one's own space
- o **Fun:** including pleasure and enjoyment

One of the core principles is that whether we are aware of it or not, we are acting (behaving) to meet these needs all the time, but with varying levels of effectiveness. The coach supports the client to become more effective in their behaviours in each of the psychological needs.

The client is often asked to assess their current situation and identify their ideal situation in all areas of their life. The coach and client may also co-design a system for tracking habits, behaviours, thoughts and approaches to identify what's working and what can be improved.

A variety of measurement tools may be used to support this aim. Ultimately, the more evidence a client may have about their progress and performance, the potential reinforcement exists for sustainable new, positive behaviours and outcomes.

Cognitive Behaviour Approach: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (or CBT) is a psychotherapy based on modifying everyday thoughts and behaviours, with the aim of positive influencing emotions. Coaches use many of the tools from this area of science.

One of the most common strategies used is for the client to keep a diary of significant events and associated feelings, thoughts and behaviours, questioning and testing assumptions or habits of thoughts that might be unhelpful or unrealistic. The coach then works with the client to explore new ways of thinking and behaving that are in line with the client's goals.

CBT is based on the idea that how we think (cognition), how we feel (emotion), and how we act (behaviour) all interact together. Specifically, our thoughts influence our feelings and our behaviour. Therefore, negative and unrealistic thoughts can cause us distress and result in problems or under-performance.

The primary model used here is the ABCs of Irrational Beliefs, developed by Albert Ellis. The first three steps analyse the process by which the client has developed irrational beliefs:

- o **A - Activating Event:** or objective situation or event that ultimately leads to some type of high emotional response or negative or unhelpful thinking.

- o **B – Beliefs:** The negative thoughts that occur to the client as a result of the activating event.
- o **C – Consequences:** The negative feelings and behaviours which result from the negative belief.

Then the coach assists the client to **Reframe**, or challenging the negative thoughts on the basis of evidence from the client's experience, or in other words to re-interpret it in a more realistic light. This often helps the client to develop more rational beliefs and supportive coping strategies.

Neuro Linguistic Programming: NLP is a field of study that includes a set of techniques, beliefs and strategies as an approach to personal development. Originally developed by Doctors Bandler and Grinder in the 1970s, NLP has influenced coaching significantly, as well as other helping professionals, and has even become a popular foundation of leadership development.

It is based on the idea that mind, body and language interact to create an individual's perception of the world and that perceptions, and therefore behaviours, can be changed by the application of a variety of techniques.

An important technique is "modelling" which involves the careful reproduction of the behaviours and beliefs of those who have achieved excellence. Although this is sometimes applied by having the client identify someone they feel is successful and then try to connect and develop some of the same beliefs and behaviours for themselves, it is more often used in helping the client identify their own definition of success. This latter approach then means that the client is able to make choices about themselves, based on their own definitions, and not necessarily try to "become" someone else or to measure themselves by someone else's standard for them.

Although NLP is quite popular, there continues to be controversy about its effectiveness, and to date has not been scientifically validated. However, many coaches and trainers are finding successful ways of using the information from this field of study, in new and unique ways with individuals, groups and organisations, and are achieving notable results.

Of the many techniques in this field, the Meta Model is arguably the foundation. It is a set of clarifying questions or language patterns designed to challenge and expand the limits to a person's model or "map" of the world. It helps detect limiting beliefs and restrictive

thinking. The coach listens carefully to what the client is saying and how they're saying it, and helps the client see the information that sits underneath the words they're speaking. Through this awareness and reframing, the client is often able to develop a more supporting way of thinking and communicating, and therefore achieving greater results.

Other techniques include anchoring, ecology and Visual / Kinaesthetic Dissociation (VK/D).

Narrative Approach: One of the most powerful tools available to coaches and other professionals is the stories their clients tell to them. Narrative coaching focuses on working in new ways with the ordinary stories clients tell and helping them tell extraordinary new stories with who and how they are in the world.

The coach also assists the client to modify narrative stories that are unhelpful or ineffective. For example, if the client has a story they tell themselves and others that they are "no good," they may be taking moments of their history and experience and creating negative bigger stories that redefine who they are.

In this area of coaching, we look at dominant stories, and how the client may be creating a story where a problem or issue that occurred now defines them as a person versus being simply affected by the situation. Coaches help the client break down the story into facts and reconstruct the story to be more supportive and accurate. This is focused on externalising language having a problem shouldn't define the person as the problem.

Assessments and Profiling: Many coaches use a variety of assessment and profiling tools and techniques. Almost all of them require the client to "self-assess" as they are the expert of their own experience and what's important to them.

These tools typically fall into one of the following categories:

- Personality Traits
- Behaviour Styles
- Thinking Styles
- Creativity Styles
- Learning Styles
- Team Roles
- Conflict Styles
- Leadership Styles
- Skills Competency
- Feedback and Performance Measurement

The importance of these tools lies not just in the data that they produced, but in the debriefing of the results of the assessments so that the client can make their own choices of new behaviours and actions based on the increased level of awareness. Assessments are not used to “label” the client, but to increase self-awareness for the purpose of planning and taking action and increasing performance.

Wheel of Life: This is a foundational tool for many coaches, and there are multiple variations of it. The Wheel of Life is a model by which the client can self-assess their satisfaction in multiple environments of their life. The same tool can also then be used for the client to assess their positive energy and effort, and/or negative energy and effort in each environment. It helps the client identify priorities and raises awareness to the level that a client can then also commit to strategies to increase their satisfaction.

Some variations of the wheel are used to measure leadership, health, financial, spiritual or community environments or components.

Values Identification: All forms of coaching, in one way or another, include values identification as part of the process. Values are, in a coaching sense, what the client holds to be most important and the basis for decision-making. Some have referred to values as our emotional guidance system.

Personal values evolve from experiences with the external world and can change over time, and they are implicitly related to choice. They guide our decisions by allowing for an individual's choices to be compared to their values.

Values are a core component of leadership, whether that is self-leadership or the leadership of others.

Coaches work with individuals to link their objectives to their values, to test if they are congruent, but also to use their values as a source of strength and inspiration to achieve the goal.

Identifying Dreams & Goals: It has been said that goals are simply dreams that have been written down. A very successful strategy in coaching is to support our clients in writing down their dreams, no matter how unrealistic they may appear to be at first glance. Some exercises, like dreams list, have a subconscious impact on the client, where the simple act of writing the dream starts a process where the client begins to take action toward achieving it. Identifying dreams also helps to clarify very specific goals, which are a priority for the client.

Another common saying is that “failing to plan is planning to fail.”

Therefore, the coach then works through the process of defining the goal, the benefits of achievement, the risks of under performance, the obstacles which may occur and the potential solutions to those obstacles, and of course the actual action plan itself.

The coach also works with the client to keep them accountable to their plan including celebrating the important progress and performance milestones along the way to the ultimate complete goal attainment.

Habits Tracking (including Time): Habits are the product of conscious choices. Therefore, coaches often work with clients to identify which choices are supporting them and which have room for improvement. In other words, which habits are effective, which require modification and which can be eliminated.

Many clients ask for support in time management, however “time management” is actually a misnomer. A more effective approach is to explore schedule choices and how to manage those choices in a more productive and satisfactory way. This process often begins by tracking the schedule choices, or habits, the individual is currently making, and from the data collected the client now has more awareness about their choices to make new ones.

Most goals involve some form of tracking opportunity, so coaches use a variety of templates, tools and strategies to support the client’s data collection and performance measurement.

Vision Creation: An essential coaching tool is for the client to create a vision of their future. This can be done in a wide variety of ways and for varying purposes.

- Creating the image of the ideal future in the mind, and discussing
- Creating a vision board, collage or video of their vision (as a visual reminder of what they’re working toward)
- Writing a Letter From The Future, as a written account from their “future self” to their “current self” about the wonderful future ahead and how it was achieved
- Writing vision statements, which are measurable and realistic

The purpose of vision tools is to help the client clarify their ideal situation in a compelling way that inspires them to put in the necessary activity to achieve the result.

Even clients who identify themselves as not visually oriented, often discover that by being able to “see” the goal achieved, they are better able to put in the required effort. This is typically because the client has stopped focusing on the past, previous unsuccessful attempts or obstacles they perceive to be in the way. They disconnect from the negative and focus on the positive generally speaking brings more efficient and effective thinking and behaviour to the goal achievement process.

Motivation & Inspiration: Coaches help clients understand the distinctions between inspiration and motivation. In a coaching context, inspiration is the compelling vision, purpose and values-connected objective that is so desirable that the client will put in the necessary action to achieve it. Inspiration is focusing on what you want.

Whereas motivation is focused on fear, particularly the fear of the consequences of under performance, or not achieving the goal. People are typically motivated more than they are inspired. They are moving away from an undesirable state, and therefore will put in the effort to avoid the negative consequences.

Motivation is often less effective and takes more energy. Conversely, inspiration typically brings faster results with less effort, although not in every case.

Some coaching clients are able to make the conscious choice to become inspired versus motivated. Where clients are motivated, coaches may work through their fears with them to see if they can be reframed into something more effective. This process may eventually lead the client to become more inspired.

Gratitude: Finally, gratitude is one of the most effective topic of conversation between any coach and client. When the client acknowledges what they are grateful for, including their skills and experiences, they are far more likely to be positive focused.

This is critical in coaching, as positive thinking and emotions achieve greater performance than negative thinking, feelings and ineffectual or lack of activity.

Components of gratitude include celebrating one’s strengths, abilities, achievements and experiences. It also looks at the situations and experiences where the outcomes didn’t match the expectations, and seeing the lessons and opportunities in those situations, and therefore being grateful for them.

For example, reframing thoughts and feelings about failure into concepts where gratitude is possible, can be a highly important part of the coaching process for many clients. If we are “stuck” in the failure mindset, we tend to attract more failure.

However, when we are in the thriving in the gratitude mindset, we tend to attract more successes that we can be grateful for.

Professional Standards & Organisations

There are many organisations around the world that support the coaching industry in one way or another. Some profess to be “The Professional Association” for coaches, however, there is little consensus within the coaching community as to which is the “right” one.

Some of the larger professional groups within the coaching community are:

- o International Coach Federation (ICF)
- o The European Coaching Institute (ECI)
- o The International Association of Coaches (IAC)

Many coaches, but not all, have some affiliation with one or more of these associations and organisations. The majority do tend to accept ICF as the largest and therefore honour the ICF’s Code of Ethics (which you can read by clicking [here](#)).

There are also specialty groups for business and executive coaching, coaching psychology and mentoring.

The coaching industry is unlikely to be regulated in the near future, and although there have been some attempts by various organisations to drive self-regulation, the coaching fraternity has not yet agreed who is best to drive this process.

Selecting A Coach

Choosing a coach can be a very personal thing, and it may be important to take time to find the right match of personality, skills, qualifications, experience and style.

Qualifications widely vary and are not always recognised by certain professional associations. This is not necessarily something to be concerned about as an individual’s credibility, capability and competency can be measured through interviewing techniques.

Below are some areas for consideration when interviewing a potential coach, in no particular order.

- Coach training
- Ongoing professional development
- Industry affiliations and credentials
- Personal and professional experience
- Styles of coaching
- Assessments, tools and models
- Testimonials and references
- Coaching topics and areas of expertise
- Philosophy of coaching
- Services offered & delivery methods (eg. in person, phone, etc)
- Rates, packages and special deals
- Terms and Conditions
- Availability
- Referral process if needed
- Insurance

For some clients, it may also be incredibly important to pay attention to intuition and what feels right or not with the potential coach.

Many coaches have a Coaching Agreement, where the coach and client agree to certain terms and conditions, rights, responsibilities and permissions based on their individual roles. In some cases, these are binding contracts, while in other cases they are coaching tools to ensure there is an operating and performance measurement system in place to ensure all parties are aware of, and demonstrating integrity to their responsibilities within the coaching relationship.

Coaching is most successful when the relationship between client and coach is trusting, open, confidential, supportive and frequently reviewed to ensure it is providing value and meeting the expectations of both parties. Coaching requires a commitment to make it work by both coach and client.

Acknowledgements & Further Reading

Many sources of information have been used to create this document. The key references have been:

“Coaching Psychology”, Grant, InPsych, June 2007

“Cognitive-Behavioural, Solution-Focused Life Coaching: Enhancing Goal Striving, Well-being and Hope”, Green, Oades and Grant, 2006

“Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions”, Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005

For further reading on Positive Psychology, please click [here](#) to be redirected to the University of Pennsylvania, Positive Psychology Centre website’s listings of media, articles, videos, research and books.

Many Wikipedia definitions were also explored, and components were included in some sections of this document.

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