

So, You Want to Become a Coach?

By Siobhan M. Murphy, MCC

Many people ask me about becoming a business or personal coach. They want to know about the training, the earnings potential, how I get clients, etc. Ten years ago, when I became a coach, the answers to those questions were fairly simple. There were only a handful of formal Coach Training Companies to choose from and no one really knew what the potential for the coaching profession was going to be. I was assured that a 6 figure income was very probable but not told how much time it would take. There were just 200 attendees at the International Coach Federation's first conference in 1996 and I was member #326 of the organization.

Fast forward 14 years later. Coaching has exploded across the globe! At the 10th annual International Coach Federation conference, over 1750 coaches attended from over 25 countries and membership in the organization tops 9,000. There are now over 165 Coach Training programs and new ones created nearly every month. In addition, the academic community is beginning to offer coach training programs as part of their MBA curriculum.

The profession is expected to double in the next few years and we'll still be far shy of the number of accountants and lawyers on the planet!

So, what's a new coach to do to get started?

Here are some questions to consider when considering becoming a coach:

Is certification important?

The ICF has created standards of conduct and training for coaches including evidence of competency, evidence of training, evidence of mentoring, experience, etc. This is a topic of debate amongst coaches. Certification seems more important to coaches than to the buying public at times. Yet, it provides a benchmark of professionalism that is useful to our clients and to coaches themselves and helps create distinctions between the kind of relationship and experience a coach provides versus other related professions such as consulting, training, therapy, mentoring and management.

Certification standards were agreed upon by the major coaching schools several years ago. They identified several common elements and skills that constitute a great coaching experience. These include the sacredness of the conversation, the way in which the coach regards the client - naturally creative and resourceful; full of potential – not as someone broken who needs to be fixed, but as a hugely talented being with an enormous contribution to make.

If you decide that certification is important to you, I recommend that you look at the schools listed at the ICF website at <http://www.coach-federation.org/training/programs.asp?prog=1>. (Certification is most commonly done through the schools now although a portfolio process is also available for those who have been coaching for some time without the benefit of formal coach training.) That said, many fine coaching programs have either chosen not to participate in the credentialing process or are in the process of becoming accredited. For me, I enjoy the commitment to the profession shown by the members of the ICF and the community of learning and professional support I have found there.

Who do you want to serve?

When you imagine yourself as a coach, who do you want to serve? There are niches for relationships coaches, parenting coaches, executive coaches, small business coaches, life coaches and more. If you know who you want to coach, look for a school that specializes or has courses in that specialty. If you don't know, look for a school that trains in a variety of different niches.

How do you best learn?

Coach Training is offered in a variety of modalities: weekend seminar, teleclass (a class taught over the phone to a group connected to conferencing equipment), small study group, formal classroom, and some combination of the above. Some of the in person training requires travel and that can increase the cost.

Do you want to own your own business, have a practice, or work inside an organization?

Coaching's value has been proven and many organizations are hiring coaches to serve inside their organization as employees. The best guess for the future is that larger organizations will use a combination of internal coaches (for cost reasons as well as for knowing the company culture) and external coaches (for their market experience and outside perspective.) If you want to coach within your existing firm, check out schools that attract internal coaches as some of the issues will differ.

When considering another profession, you will want to assess your skills and what you already bring to the table.

Have you ever run your own business before? You will want to factor that into your planning for how long it will take to be successful.

Do you have a wide network of associates? The more people you know, the easier it will be to let people know about your services.

What experience do you bring to the table? Many clients like to know that you've been there. On the other hand, I've seen some of the best business coaches come from the dramatic arts or therapeutic communities so it's not necessary to have run a Fortune 500 company to be a great coach to someone who is. Sometimes the outside perspective, safe space to be heard, reflection and presence are the best gifts a coach can offer a harried executive.

Have you hired your own coach? We learn about coaching by participating in coaching conversations – either as the client or the coach. And you'll want your own coach to help you navigate through the early years of being a coach.

Attend a coaching conference. This is the fastest way to understand the breadth of study and application of the coaching profession.

The largest is the International Coach Federation's North American conference. Or join a local chapter of the International Coach Federation. There are dozens if not hundreds of local chapters in different areas of the world.

(www.coachfederation.org) Some meetings are open to the non-members.

This is an awesome profession! If you feel called to participate, you will find it rewarding and important work in the world. Welcome!

To learn how Siobhan Murphy can bring coaching to your organization or how she can mentor you as a new coach, contact her at www.thequestconnection.com.

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