



The Coaching & Mentoring Network

connecting the community

FAQ Guide: How do I become a coach?

What background do I need to be a coach?

The diversity of coaching and mentoring means that every coach will have a different route into becoming a coach. The most common career backgrounds for business coaches are (in no particular order) occupational psychology, OD consultancy, training, HR, counselling and senior management / leadership. Within the personal or life coaching environments, backgrounds are even more diverse from sports coaches to hairdressers, from counsellors to councillors and from senior executives to actors.

Coaching is usually about facilitating your client to come up with their own ideas and solutions, to develop and manage their own learning. To be a good coach, therefore, means being able to listen and facilitate objectively without telling the client what you think the answers are! If you are thinking about becoming a coach because you like to solve peoples' problems for them, then it may be worth considering a career in an advisory capacity rather than coaching.

What training or qualifications do I need?

Training is increasingly important. There are many different coach training companies all offering something different in terms of content, delivery and style so it's important to find the course which both matches your personal learning style and will best equip you for the market you want to work in.

There is no legal requirement for a qualification or specific accreditation and different training organisations offer training at different levels from foundation through to doctorate.

It is essential that, although there is no standard accreditation, you take appropriate training and maintain your professional and personal development on an ongoing basis. In choosing a training company consider what market they aim at (eg life coaching, business, internal mentoring, executive coaching etc), and how this relates to your plans and strengths, how they deliver training (face-to-face, distance etc) and how long the course is. You might also want to consider who verifies the quality of the course or issues the qualification. For instance, some offer their own certification, others are accredited by Universities or academic bodies.

Are there any standards or codes of practice I should follow?

There are several codes of practice available – most of the main professional associations have a code which members must sign up to. Most of the training providers also either offer their own code or adopt that of a professional body. There is also a move to developing professional standards and kitemarking training programmes which are not mandatory but which are raising awareness of the need for common standards across the profession. A sample of these can be found at the websites below but there are many others.

European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC):

<http://www.emccouncil.org/src/ultimo/models/Download/4.pdf>

Association for Coaching (AC):

<http://www.associationforcoaching.com/pages/about/code-ethics-good-practice>

International Coach Federation (ICF):

<http://www.coachfederation.org/about/ethics.aspx?ItemNumber=850&navItemNumber=621>



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How much business will I get?

The number of coaches working in both the business and personal (life) coaching fields has grown considerably in the last few years and so the market is ever-more competitive. The majority of coaches are self-employed or working in small practices, although there are some large coaching practices and large consultancy firms with coaching divisions.

It is very rare for a coaching company to take on an associate who does not already have extensive experience. Competent, well-connected coaches with a good reputation and track-record make a good living and build highly successful businesses but do not believe the hype that coaching is a 'gravy train'. There are many many coaches who are only earning a part-time living at coaching, either by choice or because they are unable to find/win sufficient work. If you want to build coaching as a full-time career it will take as much dedication and marketing effort as any other services business such as consultancy and training. Some coaches who have specific experience and work in a niche or specialist area (eg young high potential managers, those seeking career change, those returning to work, specific industries or roles etc) believe that they are often more successful at building a sustainable business and client base. This may be at odds with the concept that if you can coach then you can coach anyone – but this is not always well received as a marketing message – as with any purchase, clients often want references or case studies of other similar individuals or companies you have worked with.

Some large organisations do employ coaches and coach programme managers. The latter are normally part of the HR department and often hold other responsibilities as well as coaching. The former are often attached to training departments and are focused on specific areas of the business, for instance coaching 'on-the-job' in call centres. Such organisations will also frequently appoint a bank of contracted external coaches to work with executives. Increasingly these organisations seek qualifications, extensive referenceable experience and proof of commitment to codes of practice and CPD.

Networking and word-of-mouth referrals prove time and again to be the most successful means of promotion (both for direct client and associate work). To support this many coaches find it beneficial to have an active approach to marketing, including a web site and subscriptions to third party referral services.

If you are in the position of being able to ramp up your coaching work whilst still employed then this can offer you the opportunity to build up a client base and experience without financial risk and those coaches that have managed to do this have found their transition into full-time coaching has been much easier.



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How do I get experience?

There are a number of ways you can get experience as a coach or mentor. For instance

- There are a wide and growing range of voluntary sector schemes which welcome experienced mentors. Mentoring for voluntary sector schemes is generally unpaid but most are set up to provide some initial training and specify the level of time commitment required up front. Search the Coaching & Mentoring Network website for voluntary mentoring via our search engine or visit the Mentoring & Befriending Foundation at www.mandbf.org 0161 787 8600 which advises and liaises with a wide range of volunteer schemes in the UK.
- Offer free coaching to colleagues and acquaintances. It is important to select carefully your coachees/mentees as they will need to understand that they form part of your 'training' and will need to proactively support you with feedback on your coaching. It is recommended that you do not coach immediate close friends and family as the boundaries and objectivity are harder to implement and enforce. It is also advisable to find a supervisor or peer mentor who will support you in your coaching.
- Develop a formal reciprocal mentoring / coaching relationship with a co-delegate on your training course. Some training programmes do encourage this as a part of the training programme.
- Attend networking events and workshops - these are often low cost and some of the CPD events do provide tutor support to practice new techniques during the session. For instance, check out the Association for Coaching www.associationforcoaching.com, the Academy of Executive Coaching www.academyofexecutivecoaching.com and the ICF www.coachfederation.org. The EMCC conference www.emccouncil.org is also a rich learning environment for new and experienced coaches. You can also a wide range of upcoming events on our website <http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/information-portal/events.aspx>

Where do I go for more information?

<http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/information-portal/what-are-coaching-and-mentoring.aspx>

<http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/information-portal/Articles/default.asp>

<http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/information-portal/training-and-accreditation.aspx>

Other sites:

<http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/lrmanddev/coachmntor/coaching.htm?lsSrchRes=1>

This is part of a series of Guides offered by the Coaching & Mentoring Network. Please let us know how useful it was to you by emailing guides@coachingnetwork.org.uk