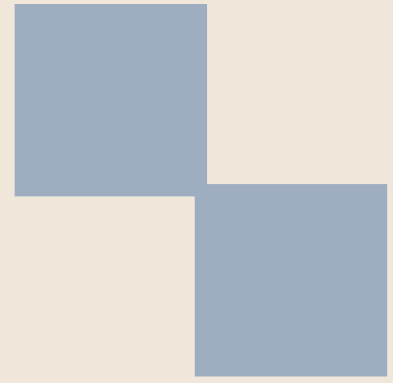


HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT COACH:

KEY SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS TO LOOK FOR



Partnering with a coach is like selecting the right travel companion. Having the right person on the trip creates a more enjoyable experience. Similarly, choosing the right coach to match your development style increases your chances of achieving personal or professional growth.

A great coach actively listens to your challenges without judgment and recognizes the importance of helping you navigate sensitive topics. A top-notch coach asks thought-provoking questions that encourage you to consider new perspectives and look within yourself for answers. Coaches don't necessarily need to be an expert in your field. However, they must be skilled at knowing when to push you and when to give you space to process the moment.

Finding the right coach is a critical first step in your coaching journey. This checklist can guide you in selecting a coach to match your learning style and aspirations.

WHY CHOOSING THE RIGHT COACH MATTERS

Your relationship with a coach is the foundation to success. A coach's approach and how they relate to you directly influence how well they can guide you to meaningful growth.

THE IMPACT OF A SKILLED COACH

Having the right travel buddies for the planned adventure creates opportunities for an unforgettable getaway. Similarly, working with the right coach who aligns with your needs accelerates growth and helps you achieve goals effectively. The right coach tailors the strategies they use to help you address challenges. As a result, you'll build greater confidence and self-awareness.

RISKS OF CHOOSING THE WRONG COACH

Just like bringing the wrong friends on vacation can ruin the trip, selecting the wrong coach can sour the experience. A mismatched style or approach can leave you feeling misunderstood or unsupported. A disconnect can impede meaningful progress, create frustration, and sometimes feel like a wasted investment.



HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT COACH

ESSENTIAL SKILLS YOUR COACH SHOULD HAVE

There are thousands of coaches worldwide ready to partner with clients. Narrow your search by looking for coaches who have completed coaching education, have earned a credential or certification in the area you want to be coached in, and have these key skills:

ACTIVE LISTENING

An effective coach should demonstrate they are truly listening to what you're saying and have the ability to understand your perspective. Someone with good active listening skills asks clarifying questions to uncover deeper insights, paraphrases your comments to help you process learning moments, and uses non-verbal cues to show they are engaged in the conversation.

POWERFUL QUESTIONING

Thought-provoking questions that challenge assumptions, encourage self-reflection, and introduce new perspectives are the cornerstone of transformational coaching experiences. Coaches who can ask open-ended questions and follow-up questions to dig deeper deliver life-changing experiences

EMPATHY AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Many times, coaching involves sensitive topics. An empathetic coach with high levels of emotional intelligence will guide you through these conversations with understanding and compassion.

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

Communication and feedback skills are critical to finding a coach because they ensure clarity, understanding, and continuous growth. When a coach is an effective communicator, they adapt their communication style to your preferences and can offer clear, constructive, and actionable feedback.

PROBLEM-SOLVING AND STRATEGIC THINKING

A world-class coach helps clients analyze complex challenges rather than providing answers. To do this effectively, a coach must demonstrate problem-solving and strategic thinking skills to help clients identify the root causes of challenges and find creative solutions while aligning short-term actions with long-term goals. A coach should also offer frameworks or tools to facilitate learning and action.

ADAPTABILITY AND CREATIVITY

While many people share similar struggles, no two people are alike. Expert coaches can recognize and tailor their coaching techniques to meet individual needs. Coaches with high levels of creativity can suggest innovative approaches to foster growth and progress.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND MOTIVATION

Change is hard — and even harder when you go it alone. When you hire a coach, you want someone who can hold you accountable to your goals and inspire you to keep going, even when things get tough. Look for a coach who encourages consistent progress, celebrates wins — even the small ones — and helps you constructively address setbacks.

PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

Change is not an easy or a quick process. A patient coach understands that growth takes time. They are willing to work with you at your own pace and remain committed to helping you through tough challenges and encourage you to stick with the process. Even when a coaching session or engagement focuses on setbacks, a good coach stays present offering encouragement, guidance, and strategies.



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QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATIONS TO CONSIDER

Coaching doesn't legally require formal training to get started, but that doesn't mean it isn't important. In fact, if you're looking to work with a coach, things like education, certifications, and real-world experience can make a big difference. They're signs that a coach has put in the work to build their skills, follow ethical standards, and show up fully for their clients. It's not about checking boxes — it's about knowing they're serious about what they do, and about helping you reach your goals.

FORMAL TRAINING IN COACHING

Completion of a formal coaching education program and earned recognized certifications like an ICF credential signals a coach has the necessary skills and credibility. Specialized training in relevant areas, such as leadership, life coaching, career coaching are also strong indicators of a coach's qualifications.

EXPERIENCE IN COACHING

It is important to consider the number of years a person has practiced as a coach. Typically, a coach with three to five years' experience has refined their skills and developed strategies proven to help clients. Depending on your goals, you may need a coach with greater experience because of the complexity of your challenges. There are also many talented coaches who are new to the profession and capable of supporting your growth when they have the right qualifications.

INDUSTRY OR SUBJECT-MATTER EXPERTISE

An effective coach does not necessarily work in the same industry as you. Those who can tailor their approach to an individual's needs and who are skilled at asking thought-provoking questions can help you develop valuable skills and achieve desired goals.

There are times when choosing a coach with industry-specific knowledge is important. If you're looking for guidance on understanding trends, challenges, and opportunities in your field, you need a coach with deep experience in the space.

PERSONAL TRAITS THAT SET A COACH APART

In addition to technical skills, you want to consider the personal traits that distinguish one coach from another. These may include but are not necessarily personality traits. Instead, they are characteristics that influence the effectiveness of a coaching relationship.

INTEGRITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

Most importantly, a coach should respect confidentiality and boundaries. Additionally, coaches dedicated to excellence adhere to ethical coaching practices like the ICF Code of Ethics. A coach who commits to upholding ethical practices puts your best interests first.

CURIOSITY AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Curiosity and lifelong learning are fundamental to good coaching. Look for coaches who are inquisitive and who invest in continual training. Earning and maintaining an ICF credential is one sign that a coach is committed to ensuring their approach remains effective and relevant to elevate the client experience.



HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT COACH

HOW TO ASSESS A COACH BEFORE COMMITTING

Signing a coaching agreement is a commitment of time and finances. Selecting the right coach allows you to maximize that investment and gives you the greatest chances for growth.

These three tips can help you confirm whether a coach is the one for you.

REQUEST AN INITIAL CONSULTATION

Discovery calls give you and the coach an opportunity to ask questions to determine fit. A low-stakes introductory call also offers insight into a person's coaching style.

During an initial consultation, you may want to ask:

What do you expect from me as a client?
How have you coached clients with goals like mine?
What does your goal-setting process look like?
How long do we work together?
Can you explain your coaching style?
What makes you different from other coaches?

REVIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Make time to read testimonials or case studies the coach has available. These can help you gauge their success in helping others achieve similar goals. Referrals can provide an even greater perspective on a coach's ability. Lean into your networks and ask trusted colleagues for recommendations or referrals for a coach.

TRIAL SESSIONS

Chances are, you wouldn't buy a vehicle without taking it out for a test drive. Similarly, many coaches — like car salespeople — offer a trial session. Use this time to evaluate how well they align with your goals and pay attention to how you feel throughout the session. A trial is likely shorter than a full coaching session, but it should provide enough time to assess if you feel comfortable working with them.

RED FLAGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Hiring a coach is like a job interview. The employer and the candidate must determine if working together is mutually beneficial. Passing over an applicant or turning down a job offer doesn't necessarily mean the person, or the position is "bad." It's just not the right fit. Chemistry and rapport are equally important in coaching.

Beyond fit, you want to ensure the coach you're considering is qualified. Keep an eye out for these red flags during your "interview" process with a coach:

- ★ Overpromising results or guaranteeing success.
- ★ Lack of formal training or verifiable credentials.
- ★ Poor communication or inability to provide clear answers.
- ★ A one-size-fits-all approach without customization.



HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT COACH

FINAL THOUGHTS

Coaching is only successful when you feel challenged and supported by your coach. Before signing a contract, learn about a coach's experience and expertise, evaluate their communication skills, and consider their ability to tailor their approach to your needs. Finding a coach who is trustworthy and who has strong emotional intelligence skills is equally important.

While experience, qualifications, and testimonials should be considered, don't discount your intuition. If something doesn't feel right — whether it's the coach's style, approach, or overall fit — trust your gut and look for a coach who can better support your journey.

Research, ask questions, and take the next step in your coaching journey. Find a coach using the **ICF Credentialed Coach Finder**.

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