

The Woman's Guide to Choosing Your Ideal Career Coach

Introduction

Welcome to 'A Woman's Guide to Choosing Your Ideal Career Coach'.

If you're reading this guide, you are probably someone who is stuck in their career – perhaps you've reached the glass ceiling, or maybe you have ended up in a career that just doesn't suit you. You might be returning to work after a career break, or looking for a new job after being laid-off. Or you could be looking to take your career to the next level.

Somewhere along the way you've heard about Coaching, and, at the very least you are curious about what it involves. Ah, and – given the title – you are probably a woman.

In case you're wondering 'Why a **Woman's** guide?'...The top marketers all know that women make buying decisions differently from men. Our brains are wired differently from men, and apparently we're much more likely to buy from emotion than they are. Coaching is all about having a relationship, and women do that differently from men too.

Women experience different career challenges from men. The glass ceiling hasn't yet been smashed everywhere, and while men might take paternity leave or take on sole childcare responsibilities, they aren't the ones who have the babies! So this guide is designed to help you **as a woman** choose the coach who is right for you.

It does what it says on the tin.

- It helps you understand what coaching is all about, so you can decide whether coaching is the right solution for you before you start paying out
- It guides you through the process of choosing a career coach, giving you handy hints and tips, so you know what steps to follow to get the right career coach for you
- It gives you a list of questions to ask a prospective coach, so you can 'interview' them more effectively
- It suggests places where you might look for a coach, because, if you aren't in the coaching business, this is likely to be one of the biggest questions you have.

Why Career Coaching?

Career coaching is one of several different ways of moving your career forward. For instance you might go to a careers advisor, who will tell you about different careers that are out there, or you might pick up a self-help book, or talk to your line manager and/or to friends and colleagues or people who have had a similar experience to you.

The main benefit of coaching is that it can be tailored to you and your needs. Not all coaches do this: some have standard programmes that they use, so they will take you step by step through the same set of exercises as every other client. However a good coach should be able to flex her approach to your requirements.

You can bounce ideas off another human being – something you don't get from reading a self-help book. Friends can sometimes be nervous about giving you feedback which they think you may not want to hear, or they may dissuade you from making choices which, in their eyes, are risky, or 'not you'. At the same time, friends may not have deep knowledge about the huge range of career options that are available. The same is true for line managers and colleagues.

There are more reasons for working with someone who is not a friend or family member, and doesn't even know you that well. (A good coach will quickly get to know and understand you, anyway). There may be things you don't want to share with your friends and family, which you can share with an independent coach. Your coach is non-judgemental, and they won't assume that you have particular strengths or weaknesses, which friends and family often do. How often have you heard a loved one say 'you **always**....' or 'that's **so** like you' or 'but you've never liked X'?

A good coach will listen to you and focus on you. Clients often tell me it's like being given a gift of time and space dedicated entirely to themselves.

Some people think that coaching must be expensive, and we'll talk more about the costs in the section called 'How Much?'. But ask yourself, 'compared to what?' If a coaching programme costs as much as a good holiday, but is going to help you find a job which pays double or treble what you are currently earning so that you can afford better holidays and improve the overall quality of your life, then coaching is definitely going to give you the advantage in the longer term.

The bad news is that coaching doesn't give you an instant fix. Mind you, there's very little in this world that instantly fixes complex problems. If it's an instant fix you're looking for, then you are probably best off looking for some other solution (and let me know what it is if you find it).

Coaching means that you will need to spend some time on yourself, thinking about yourself and coming up with your own ideas about what you want for yourself. It's extremely empowering, because you're not at the mercy of someone else's prejudices and you'll get help dealing with your beliefs about yourself which hold you back.

Here's how it worked for me.

I had my first coach when I was laid off in the mid '90s. She was provided by the company as part of a severance package and was what is known as an 'Outplacement Coach' (a fancy name for career coaches who specialise in working with people who have been laid off).

We worked together for 8 sessions, just her and me. She encouraged me to think about what I was good at, and what I wasn't, what I loved doing, and what I hated, and where I was in my life. She gave me feedback about myself, based on her impression of me, and how I reacted to her questions and ideas.

We met weekly. Sometimes we would just talk, and sometimes she would encourage me to do exercises. The one I remember most clearly was one where we looked at my life in terms of where I had been, where I was right now, and where I wanted to be in the future.

Sometimes there would be 'homework' – things for me to do between meetings, like research (even then I knew I wanted to have my own business, but I wasn't sure what kind of business), or filling out a self-assessment questionnaire.

By the third session I knew what kind of business I wanted – a coaching business, where I could help people the way she had helped me.

What I valued most was the combination of working with someone I felt I could trust, who wasn't part of my circle of friends and family, who assumed I was capable of anything I put my mind to, along with the flexibility to focus on where I was in my journey.

It truly changed my life.

What IS Coaching?

This section talks you through what coaching is and how it works.

Even among coaches, you'll still hear different opinions about what coaching is, and what a coach does or doesn't do. You'll also see terms like 'mentor' thrown into the mix, and you may wonder what the difference is between coaching and therapy or coaching and counselling.

Definitions of coaching

The **International Coach Federation** – one of the leading professional bodies for coaches (more about professional bodies later) - gives the following definition:

'Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.'

Wikipedia offers this:

Coaching refers to the activity of a coach in developing the abilities of coachees or clients. Coaching tends to focus on the achievement by coachees of a goal or specific skill. Methodologies for coaching are positioned away from the directive or the facilitative, and rest on accompanying clients within a dialogue that will allow emerging patterns and solutions to surface. Coaching lies out of the scale between mentoring and training on one end, and psychotherapy and counselling (sic) at the other.

Are you clear yet? If not, don't worry you are not alone.

To be honest, the definition of coaching depends who is giving it. You will generally get a somewhat different answer from a football or tennis coach than you will from a life coach or a career coach.

What's important is that the coach **helps, guides, and supports** the client in achieving her goals, whether these are to do with winning the next tournament, getting your dream job, finding health, wealth and happiness or getting in touch with your spiritual side.

The traditional sports coach is often portrayed in films as part teacher, part bully, part parent-substitute, and you can still see plenty of examples of this breed in sports halls around the world. Another description is 'trainer'.

You'll also see this kind of 'coaching' in the business world. It's often termed '**directive**' coaching, because the coach is telling the client what they should or shouldn't do. A lot of my business coaching clients – male and female - really struggle to make the transition from being directive, to becoming a better listener.

Modern coaching has moved on, and tends to regard these models as old-fashioned. In fact we coaches can be quite disdainful of that kind of 'coaching' – so disdainful that we have to put quotation marks around it. But it does work for some people, and if that's what you respond to, then don't knock it out of court when you're thinking about who you want to work with.

So what is the modern coaching model?

The modern coaching model is, dare I say it, more feminine. Here are the key distinctions:

- **The Listening Coach.** The coach listens rather than tells (the technical term is 'non-directive' coaching).
- **The coach assumes that the client has all (or most) of the answers.** themselves – it's just a matter of asking carefully crafted questions to help the client get at the answers.
- **Coaching is usually goal-oriented,** so the client is encouraged to set goals, whether for a single coaching session, or for the whole programme of sessions.
- **The chemistry, or quality of the relationship** between coach and coachee, is important. You don't have to like each other, but you do need to trust and respect each other.
- **A good coach will help you deal with beliefs you have about yourself** which aren't actually true, but which limit you. (For example, it is true that I am short, and there's not much that will change that except a very high pair of heels. But for years I believed I wasn't intelligent enough to have a good career, despite a list of academic qualifications as long as your arm. Duh!)
- **Feedback is important and supportive.** The coach may challenge the client if the client's thinking is not supporting her in pursuit of her goals, but it's done in a supportive way.
- **The coach acts as a 'mirror' for the client,** so the coach reflects back what the client has said or done, perhaps with clues about how it made the coach feel to see/hear the client.

- **The coach puts the client's interests first** – so the focus is on you, not on the coach.
- **Ethics are important.** The professional coaching bodies all have codes of conduct which covers ethics. Here are a few *examples* of what is covered: the content of the coaching session is confidential (exceptions may be made if the client's employer is paying for the coaching); the coach will not to engage in a sexual relationship with the client; the coach will not take advantage of the client.
- **Professionalism is important.** There's a lot of debate among coaches about whether a coach should have been trained or not, and to what level. The professional coaching bodies all have different standards, and there are plenty of coaches out there who do not have formal training but do an excellent job. The general consensus is that it is a profession, and coaches need to treat it as such.

Coaching, mentoring, therapy, counselling

A common question is about the difference between coaching, mentoring, therapy and counselling. Only you can decide whether it really matters. Here are some very broad generalisations to consider.

- **Coaching** is generally present and future looking. The coach tends to be facilitative, or non-directive, so they listen rather than tell. It's generally goal-focused. In a business setting, there is a lot of emphasis on coaching as a method of learning.
- **Mentoring** is sometimes used as another word for coaching. In general a mentor will be someone who has particular knowledge that you want to tap into. It might be a senior colleague in your organisation who knows their way around, or it might be an expert. Mentors in an organisation are often older and/or more senior, but not necessarily so. Mentors may or may not have good listening and question skills. I had a mentor for years who was not good at listening but gave me excellent advice.
- **Therapy** tends to look into the past, resolving problems in the past so you can move forward towards a better future. They tend to focus on more serious issues. For instance, I went to a therapist, not a coach, when I was experiencing severe depression. Again, this is a huge generalisation. Therapists are trained to be good listeners. In addition their training may include specific psychiatric or psychological approaches. Training courses for therapists are generally longer than those for coaches, and therapists may be expected to be in therapy themselves.

- **Counselling** sits somewhere between counselling and coaching. Counsellors are generally trained to explore personal issues (for example bereavement) in greater depth than a coach.

A note about supervision

If you review the resumes/biographies of different coaches, you may come across the term supervision. Contrary to what you may think, supervision is a good thing, and does not imply incompetence! It has emerged from the therapy world, and is increasingly being adopted by coaches.

Supervision is usually offered by more experienced coaches who may or may not have taken special training. The supervisor can take a more objective view on the coach's experience with her clients, perhaps pointing out where the problems the client is facing somehow model problems the coach is facing elsewhere in her life.

The supervisor can also help a coach think through ethical dilemmas such as 'am I the best person to help this client, or should I refer her to someone else'. Sometimes a coach may feel that the client is not making progress. The supervisor can help the coach identify new strategies for working with the client

What Kind of Coach?

This section is all about identifying the sort of coach who is going to be right for you.

The classic 'coaching' answer to the question 'What kind of coach should I choose' would be something along the lines of 'What kind of coach do you think would suit you best?'

Here are few pointers to help you think about this. (It's written up as a checklist in the Resources section).

- **Man or woman?** There are some excellent male coaches, and if you prefer working with the male energy, then find a good male coach.
- **Age?** Do you have a preference about the age of your coach? There is a lot to be said for picking someone who has plenty of life experience, and the wisdom to go with it. The wisdom is even more important than the experience, though, and if you're in your twenties and want to work with someone who is younger than your granny, there are great coaches in their twenties, and thirties, and forties (and of course we're all great after 50!).
- **Background and experience?**
 - Do you want a coach who has been in the same situation as you (e.g. returned from maternity leave; got laid off; was passed over for promotion)? They are more likely to empathise, but they may bring personal baggage.
 - Familiarity with your industry? Clients often assume this will be critical before we start, but then find that it is the nature of the relationship and my ability as a coach that is important, rather than my knowledge of a particular business sector.
 - How much coaching experience should they have? This often boils down to budget. Experienced coaches tend to be more expensive, because you are paying for their experience, and there some coaches who do not have much coaching experience, but are already very good at what they do.
- How much training should they have? When I started out, there were almost no coach training courses available. The situation is very different today, so there is no excuse for your coach to be untrained. Some organisations offer an introductory weekend – you might want your coach to have something rather better than that. A typical coaching course may run a weekend a

month, so if your prospective coach says they spent a year in training, check out what that means in terms of a) face-to-face training and b) hours spent on home study and practice.

- **Values, Beliefs, Ethnicity, Class etc.** If it's important to you to work with someone from your religion or culture, or whose values and beliefs are a close match to your own, then the chances are that, somewhere in the world, there will be a suitable coach. I've worked with people from backgrounds and belief systems which were very different from mine, and it has never been a problem on either side.
- **Face to face or phone?**
 - Some people (coaches as well as clients) prefer working face to face. The technology nowadays means that you can achieve a fairly good simulation of face to face using a web cam and something like Skype. There are plenty of ways of phoning across the world for free (Skype is one of these).
- **Location**
 - If you want to work face to face with your coach, then you need to think about travel time and costs. If the coach travels to you, they will charge you for it. I work with one client who spends a day at a time with me, to minimise travel.
 - Whether you are meeting face to face or talking over the phone or web, where will you physically be? In a coffee shop (I've done plenty of coaching in coffee shops around UK, although it's not generally regarded as best practice. It worked for my clients, and that's what was important). In an office? On the phone with the kids running around screaming (not recommended)?
 - How important is it that the coach is in the same country and speaks the same form of English as you?
- **Budget**
 - How much can you afford? As I mentioned earlier, the real question is 'compared to what'. People will shell out happily for a great dress, or a holiday, or a fancy phone, but pull back when it comes to investing something intangible, like coaching.
 - If you pay peanuts, you may well get a monkey.

- **References and testimonials**

- Can your coach provide references and/or testimonials? If not, then run like hell, unless they have been personally recommended to you by someone who has used their services. It either means they haven't been doing it long enough to collect any testimonials, or they aren't that great, or they are too lazy or reticent to ask people to give them a reference. (I was the reticent one, until recently!)

An example of a testimonial

Invest in yourself. Time spent with Jane Lewis feels wonderful. It's a good workout after which you feel relaxed, energised and full of ideas. If, however, you think that sounds like indulgence, you also come away with a list as long as your arm of simple things to do to realise your investment. Jane keeps you moving - forward. Very progressive!"

Faye Sharpe – MD, Maraposa Ltd.

What Can I Expect From A Coach?

Apart from professionalism and an ethical approach, here's what you can expect from your coach.

- **An introductory chat** to give you the chance to decide whether you want to work with this person. (It works both ways: it gives the coach a chance to see if they are the right person to help you). I always offer a free half hour initial conversation.
- **A coaching contract or agreement.** This should set out what you can expect from your coach, and what your coach expects from you. Most coaching contracts I have seen would not stand up in a court of Law, nor are they intended to.
- **An indication of how many sessions,** their duration, and over what time period.
- **Clear information about their cancellation policy and other charges.** Cancellation policies vary hugely between coaches. I run different types of programme, and the cancellation policy is specific to the programme. Make sure they explain clearly up front how much it will all cost.
- **Punctuality.** If they say your session is an hour long, then you should get an hour, and it should start at the agreed time. If you are late, then it's up to the discretion of the coach whether she makes up that time for you.
- **'Being there for you'.** Your coach should give you 100% attention during the session. If they are answering the phone or responding to other distractions, call them on it, or resign them!
- **Fair and honest feedback.** If you don't want good quality feedback, then don't hire a coach. If you don't like the way your coach gives you feedback, then give them some feedback on how you would like it to be done.
- **Help with identifying and dealing with thought patterns** and habits that limit your success.
- **Help with designing and achieving your goals.** Most coaching is goal-focussed, and there's plenty of evidence from the world of psychology to suggest that having well-designed goals radically increases our chance of success. Your coach should help you with that. The catch is that, for most goals, achieving the goal means taking action, and that's something your coach cannot do for you. They can encourage you, remind you, nag you, but you are the one who has to do what is necessary.

- **Review** or the opportunity for you to give them feedback. Most coaches will check in with you at the beginning of each session, or even between sessions, to see how things are going. On longer programmes (10 session plus) there will often be a review halfway through to see whether the coaching is working and what – if anything – needs to be done differently.
- **Confidentiality.** If you have personally hired and are paying for the coach, then everything should be confidential, unless there are good legal reasons why this is not possible. If your organisation has hired the coach and is paying for her, then it's wise to check exactly what can stay confidential. Personally I discourage organisations from demanding specific information about what went on in my meetings with their employees, but if they are paying then it may be necessary to make some compromises.

How Much?

There are no rules determining how much coaching costs. It will depend on the experience of the coach, the type of programme they run, the value they put on themselves, whether you are meeting in person or face to face, the market they are in, the country they are in, and many other factors.

This is one area where you need to think about the value you want to get out of the coaching experience. Ask yourself:

- What's it worth to me to get my career goals?
- Can I get these goals on my own without help?
- What would I would be willing to give up to get my goals (e.g. holiday, new outfit, dining out, new furniture)?
- How much am I willing to invest in myself and my future?
- Does my preferred coach offer payment plans or easy payment terms?

Dishing the dirt

The last thing coaches want to talk about is their charges, so here's where I dish the dirt on what you need to look out for.

Newbie coaches will often offer their services for free (pro bono coaching, as it's known) in order to build up their experience and testimonials.

Thereafter, it's all a bit of a lottery, so you need to ask your prospective coach. When I am hiring a coach for myself, which I do on a regular basis, I won't bother with anyone who is charging LESS than \$150/per hour (around £100). If they are charging less than that, it's a red flag to me that they either lack experience, or that they are not in demand, or that they are undervaluing themselves – and why would I want to be coached by someone who undervalues herself?

Some coaches charge by the hour, or by the session. (With telephone coaching, a session often is 45 minutes to an hour. Longer sessions are common for face to face coaching). Bear in mind that most coaches build in preparation time when calculating how much to charge.

Assuming a series of one hour sessions, the coach will probably recommend a minimum of 4-6 sessions for career coaching. It depends on the nature of the problem, but this is generally the minimum. I find 10 sessions every fortnight or

3 weeks works well, but I've had clients achieve spectacular results in just 4 sessions, and one client who got everything he wanted in 2 sessions.

Many coaches charge by the programme. The programme will include a given number of sessions, perhaps with ongoing support and access to a range of resources. The cost of the programme may include psychologically based tests (known as psychometrics) to assess your skills, aptitudes and personal preferences, or these may be extra.

A coach may offer you **360 degree feedback**. It is called 360 feedback because you seek feedback from a range of people, including peers, colleagues, people who work for you, people you work for, customers, other people you are associated with. If you aren't working then you can get feedback from friends, relatives and other people who know you, although this is arguably less useful. Again, there's a huge variety of 360 tools, ranging from very cheap online, generic quizzes, to your coach talking to the various individuals and creating a tailor made report for you.

Where do I find a coach?

The obvious place to start is Google. Google terms like 'career coach' or 'career coaching' or 'career success' and see what comes up. If you want to work with someone from your country, then narrow your search down accordingly.

Coaching is a growth industry and there are more and more coaching schools and professional bodies appearing on the scene. The large English-speaking markets like USA, UK, Australia, and Canada tend to have a more diverse range of schools and professional bodies.

In UK I always suggest to people that they check out the UK websites of ICF (International Coach Federation) and AC (The Association for Coaching). These are well-established professional bodies and they approve or accredit both coaches and training schools. I recommend you look for coaches who are accredited by one of these organisations, or who have attended one of the coaching schools approved by them.

Some coaching schools provide a referral service for their students, so you can approach the schools directly to find if they know anyone who meets your criteria.

Check out the networks/forums of the coaching community – such as Euro-Coach List. Eavesdrop where you can to see what they are interested in and how they come across.

Word of mouth can be invaluable. Ask your friends, family and colleagues if they know any Career coaches. Similarly, if you are a member of a professional organisation, they might know of people who specialise in your industry or profession.

And finally...

I hope you have enjoyed this guide to finding a career coach, and that it will serve you well. The resources section gives you a coach selection checklist, and the names and links for some of the top professional coaching bodies in UK, USA and elsewhere.

Of course, I've written it from the perspective of an experienced Career Coach, so there may be things I haven't covered which you would like to know about. If that's the case, please fill out the online survey ([here](#)) to let us know.

And if you have already booked on the Essential Career Success programme, but haven't yet arranged your complimentary initial call, please email me at the following address: thecareersuccessdoctor@gmail.com

Resources

How to choose a coach checklist

- Man or woman?
- Age?
- Background and experience?
- Values, beliefs, ethnicity etc
- Face to face or phone?
- Location
- Budget
- References and testimonials

Professional organisations

Here is a selection of Professional Coaching Organisations from around the world. It's only a selection, and these are all ones I know of, or know some of the key players.

Coaching is unregulated in most countries, so ANYONE can set up a 'professional body'. In fact ANYONE can set up as a 'professional' coach. You have been warned!

UK

[The Association for Coaching \(AoC\)](#) (and growing world wide)

[International Coach Federation \(ICF\)](#) (also in USA)

[European Mentoring and Coaching Council \(EMCC\)](#) (branches in many European Countries)

[Association of Professional, Executive, Coaching and Supervision \(Apeps\)](#).

USA

International Coach Federation USA <http://www.coachfederation.org/>

International Institute of Coaching <http://internationalinstituteofcoaching.org/>

Worldwide

The Society for Coaching Psychology www.societyforcoachingpsychology.net