

Choosing the right coach for you

I can't stress hard enough how important it is to research a number of coaches before you decide to invest your hard-earned cash on a coach.

Be bold and ask them questions about their coaching approach, their experience and qualifications and why they would be the best coach for you.

Make sure that you like them and regard them as being highly professional. Your gut reaction is often your greatest ally, so use it!

I've compiled a ten point checklist to help you think about some important factors before choosing your coach.

1. Rapport

Finding a coach you like is essential. Even if a good friend of yours has recommended a coach to you and *you* don't like them, don't work with them. It's as simple as that.

A coaching relationship is an extremely personal one and you need to feel 100% comfortable with your coach to benefit fully. A powerful coaching relationship relies a great deal on honesty and trust so it is essential that you are comfortable with your coach.

2. Trial sessions

Many professional coaches will offer a free no-obligation session, enabling you to trial what coaching is all about before you invest in a monthly program. Although it is only a taster, this is a great way to experience what a session will be like and to get to know the coach a little better.

I personally believe that this session should be about an hour long to enable the client the best chance of deciding whether coaching is for them or not. Ask the coaches you are considering if they will offer you a free trial session.

3. Your values

Any great coach will ensure that your values are discussed and play an important part in your coaching discussions, session goals and action plans. Your values are what you hold most dear in your life – 'freedom', 'happiness', 'strong relationships' are three examples.

It's important that the direction you take with your coaching is aligned with your values; ask the coaches you're considering to explain if and how they work with values during their coaching programs. Unless they say "values are of paramount importance and will be instrumental to your sessions" (or something along those lines), stay clear of working with them.

4. Support outside of sessions

Certainly initially, coaching normally takes place on a weekly basis to maintain momentum and to keep you fired up as you begin to meet your goals and enjoy your successes.

For this reason, it is essential that you are able to contact your coach in between sessions to discuss any setbacks you've had, ask any questions or tell them about a success you've just experienced!

The coaches who do offer this will usually specify the lines of communication that are acceptable and whether there are any limits in place. For example a coach might offer her clients telephone calls between sessions but limit them to 5 minutes each.

5. Flexible

A great coach will develop sessions and/or coaching programs that are suitable to your requirements. Don't be shy to ask your coach how their sessions or programs will be tailored to your needs.

6. Price structures

Different coaches charge different fees. Some might offer an hourly rate, whilst others may charge on a monthly basis for a number of sessions. It's fairly obvious to say that you should choose a solution that you can afford but most importantly, don't just choose a coach based on the fact that they're cheaper. It is absolutely imperative that you pick a coach whom you like and whom you believe will add the *greatest value to you* and your progress.

Also, it's worth asking how they expect to be paid – most coaches will ask for payment upfront; some will offer a clause that you can have a refund on any sessions you do not use or you can 'save' them as credit for a later date; some may wait until your bank transfer or cheque has cleared before they will start coaching you. Whatever their system, ensure you're fully aware and comfortable with it from the outset.

7. Referrals

Any good coach will base his/her business on referrals. Working in a service industry, a coach relies on referrals to be successful, so a coach with a thriving practice will have many, many satisfied customers who spread the word about them.

Ask the coaches you talk to about their referral policies and ask to read testimonials from satisfied clients.

8. Boundaries

Coaching is about challenging your current perspectives and can lead to you being pushed out of your comfort zones.

A great coach will ask you to communicate when a boundary of yours has been reached or crossed. People are very different; some clients enjoy being stretched to their absolute limits whilst others take time to absorb new information before deciding whether or not they want to be stretched.

It is the job of your coach to push you but also to support you. If you think being pushed might cause you some problems, ask the coach about it.

9. Guarantees

Ask the coaches you are considering whether they offer any guarantees – some will and others won't so it's best to ask if it's something that's important to you.

10. Different coaching approaches

Be aware that different coaches will have had different training and will approach their sessions and clients differently. This may also be a result of their coaching specialism, their personality or their own experience as to how they believe results are best obtained.

This brings me right back to the beginning – make sure you like your coach before deciding s/he is the coach for you. Give them a call or ask if they provide a free trial session so that you can make a decision you're absolutely comfortable with.

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