



Sailing Your Own Ship

My Experiences
Working with a
Professional Coach

by Amy Zangerle

Even the most accomplished person can use a little encouragement to motivate himself or herself to tackle new challenges and levels of achievement. A professional coach can help clarify short-term and long-term goals and plans for the future.

Boarding the Ship

Several months ago, I decided that I wanted to improve my effectiveness in my job and career. Though I've been successful in the past, I felt that I wanted to enhance and sharpen my skills in some areas to ensure that I was continuing to perform to the best of my ability. Many ideas presented themselves, but I just wasn't sure where to start. I felt that I needed someone with a neutral but interested point of view to help me prioritize the skills I needed to improve and to help me see situations in a new light. That person needed to be able to help me sort through my daily struggles and to assist me in making plans for the future.

After reading a variety of articles mentioning the benefits of professional coaching, I thought I would give it a try. After all, I had nothing to lose.

Charting the Course

First, I needed to select a coach. My main criterion was finding a great coach: someone with whom I felt comfortable talking, someone who could understand the difficulties I was facing, and someone who could guide me toward making positive changes in my life.

After soliciting recommendations from colleagues and friends and consulting a few coaching websites, I spoke with several coaches to get a sense of each one's personality and approach. Most coaches offer at least one complimentary "trial" session during which the client and coach can learn about each other.

Each coach with whom I talked was different, and not all of them were a good "fit" for me. One seemed more intent on giving advice and reciting his favorite analogies than hearing and understanding my concerns. I felt that the coach I selected was one who took the time to hear me out, who would understand my frustrations and who would focus on discovering what kind of person I was before giving advice or guidance. I felt that her personality, coaching style, methods and experience would be a good match.

Beginning the Journey

A coach usually will request a minimum commitment, such as three months. This ensures enough time for the client and the coach to work together to analyze issues and come up with solutions or plans for moving forward. Some people prefer to conduct coaching sessions over the phone, but it was more valuable for me to meet with my coach in her office. I felt that the face-to-face interaction would help us get to know each other better and would also give me a neutral place to talk about work or personal issues without distractions. We agreed to meet weekly in one-hour sessions.

On the High Seas

During our first few sessions, my coach and I worked through several exercises that helped both of us know me better. One helpful tool was an online strengths assessment that clarified my strongest characteristics and abilities. Another tool was a values assessment that identified my inherent values and motivations. Both of these assessments have helped me to understand my feelings and behaviors, such as why I reacted in a particular way to a situation at work. I could also begin to speculate why others might react differently to the same situation.

The concepts of my strengths and values have come up repeatedly in subsequent sessions, which has reinforced my understanding of my motivations. By revisiting the concepts week after week, my coaching sessions have made me think more deeply about my own characteristics and how I can best use those characteristics when designing my career path.

During our sessions, my coach and I have also brainstormed various perspectives. This involves taking a problem, comparing it to a more abstract situation and then coming up with other points of view to explore and examine in the original situation. For example, if I were having trouble making a decision about a task, my coach might ask me to imagine how I would feel as the decision-maker if I were a park ranger with solo responsibility for overseeing and caring for the entire landscape. Next, I would imagine how I would feel

as a bridge-builder bringing together two separated cities. Exercises such as this have helped me realize that there are various ways to view a situation. Though I might be so deeply entrenched that I can only see the most obvious perspective at first, other ways of looking at it can be productive.

Taking in the Sights

For me, coaching has been extremely valuable. I have increased confidence in my own skills and abilities, my value and my contributions. Coaching has helped me question assumptions I was making about work, life and myself. I am developing the ability to encourage and to motivate myself. Most important, I am focusing on the fact that I am responsible for my own development. I am the captain of my own ship. My coach is teaching me to refocus my energies to achieve my personal goals and to improve myself, and she is helping me to plan my career future.

Could I have come to these realizations on my own? Perhaps. In fact, my coach often brings up ideas or concepts that I have read about or learned about in the past. Being able to apply generic concepts to my real-life experiences, and having recurring sessions where those concepts are reinforced, have helped to make them more solid and applicable.

We can allow others to push our ships around, or we can take the responsibility and chart our own course. Working with a coach has been well worth the time and money spent and has helped me become more invested in planning my own future. I highly recommend coaching to those who desire to improve themselves and their performance. [ILTA](#)

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