

What is Life Coaching?

Life coaching is helping people to achieve the best answers to their problems for themselves, whether scholastic, business, sport or personal. Life coaching is an alliance with the client, offering encouragement, while moving forward towards achieving their dreams and goals.

A life coach empowers others, motivates them, helps them to change their life around; a life coach is a sounding board, a facilitator, showing a life of no limitations to the client. A life coach listens without judgement, and accepts the client without judgement. A life coach helps the client to achieve the fulfilling life they want. However, a life coach is not a counsellor, and recognises the need to refer the client onto someone else, should they need to do so. Therapy is 90% dealing with the past. Life coaching deals with the now – decide what you want to be, and just do it! (See the Appendix for three case studies.)

There are different applications to life coaching and it may be applied to the following:

- Executive and corporate coaching
- Small business coaching
- Personal/children/teens and college students
- Career coaching
- Sports coaching

In order to understand what life coaching involves, it is useful to review the approach taken by a life coach to their client.

The life coach will find out what they can about the client's life so far. Every client has a history, and the life coach needs to know it, so this is a key stage in the relationship. Once an understanding of the client has been achieved, the life coach can then help the client to see their life more clearly, and get them to focus on this background. The majority of clients appreciate support to identify and focus on their most important goals, so with the life coach's help a simple goal plan can be drawn up. This could be for ninety days, followed by a broader list of where the client sees themselves in three years time, and in five years time.

Questions regarding improvement, prompt the client to think of things to achieve in areas of their life that they might not have thought of otherwise: family/ home life, financial situation, career/job, personal character, communication skills and so on. One essential is to help the client to understand precisely what is happening in their life, and this better understanding can lead to a more realistic assessment of options which are also considered through questioning. As a life coach, one must constantly guard against prescribing for the client. The client always has the answers within themselves – it is the coach's duty, through questioning, to bring out these answers from the client.

In life coaching, the will of the individual is of paramount importance in their moving forward, in whatever aspect of their life they wish to change. Saying 'yeah, yeah', and doing nothing about it certainly will not bring change! However, the client generally wants this change to occur, and that is why they are attending a life coaching session in the first place. They must want to commit to the programme, generally of six sessions for a 'quick fix', and no more than twelve for long-term change, as more techniques are then taught.

Once the will of the individual has been brought into play, the client begins to focus purposefully on what goals are decided between them and the coach. It is important to define goals in the context of life coaching. A goal is the object of the person's ambition or effort, an aim. Therefore, we look only at the goals of a client when we really know how they tick, based on the previous questioning, and then identify the key elements:

- Who – the strengths and resources
- What – goals/improvements
- How – strategies employed to attain those goals

A client may wish to base their goals in a coaching session on any of the six areas of their life:

1. Family and home
2. Financial and career
3. Spiritual and ethical
4. Physical and health
5. Social and cultural
6. Mental and educational

Setting goals in each area of life will ensure a more balanced life, as one begins to examine and change the fundamentals of everyday living, so using a wheel of life diagram is a very valuable tool to have the client fill in at this stage.

It is important to make sure that the goal the client is working for is something they really want, not something that sounds good. As a life coach, one may have the client write their goals in the positive and the present, rather than in the negative and in the future – tomorrow never comes. When writing a goal plan, it is important always to use 'I am' statements, not 'I will' or 'want to', for example, in sport: 'I am improving my game of tennis', or 'I am practising meditation'.

In life coaching, writing goals becomes a road map for success. Although just the act of writing them down can set the process in motion, it is also extremely important to review goals frequently, and the more focused one is on one's goals, the more likely one is to accomplish them. The client should write a personal wish list – preferably on really good quality paper, and maybe with a special pen, to stress its value and durability – to read on a daily basis, or they might make up a Focus Board containing as many images of what is wished for as possible. They should pin this board in a visible place such as over the foot of the bed where it may be viewed last thing at night and first thing in the morning – this is a very

powerful exercise, and subconsciously keeps the mind focused. Sometimes clients need to revise a goal as circumstances and other goals change. We cannot legislate for life and outside influences.

Life coaches and their clients create SMART goals that are: Specific; Measurable; Attainable; Realistic; and Tangible. Coach and client then continue in a simple four step coaching model called the GROW model:

1. **Goal** - Coach and client agree on a specific aim, objective or topic for discussion. This must be clearly communicated.
2. **Reality** - The coach invites the client to do self-assessment and offers specific examples to illustrate their point. As a coach, one must be careful with the language used here – it should be evaluative, non-judgemental and objective. It is important to keep the balance of conversation 80/20 preferably, in favour of the client. As a coach, one should try to get to the core of the issue, and pick up on both verbal and non-verbal clues dropped by the client.
3. **Options** - The coach elicits suggestions from the client by asking effective questions and guides them towards making choices. This is crucial to facilitate the client in finding their own solution. The coach has to discuss and debate a number of options rather than speedily reaching a solution. As a coach, one has to explore all excuses/crutches with the client and not dismiss them out of hand.
4. **Wrap Up** - In conclusion, coach and client commit to action, define a timeframe for the objective and identify how to deal with possible difficulties, and set a date for their next session. It is essential to offer follow-up support – without becoming a crutch for the client – and, as a coach, to think of the effect of the session on the client.

Listening skills

An exercise which illustrates these skills is to chat to a friend for five minutes about any topic under the sun, and then get them to repeat exactly what you have said. This is a learnt skill called co-listening, where one concentrates totally on the other person, facing them, watching their face, concentrating. People who are deaf and who lip read do this very well, and people in the first flush of love do so too. The body is totally turned towards the other, fully focused on the other, not thinking yeah, yeah and interjecting here and there. Just listening, and then repeating afterwards.

There are, in fact, a number of barriers to good listening such as the following:

- Preoccupation in the coach's mind with a personal issue – what will I make for the tea? – or through poor organisation, leading to a rushed session without any prior preparation. It is vital to read up on all previous sessions' notes and reflect and relax before commencing any new coaching session.
- Listening to the language but not to the tone and resonance in a client's voice. Listening is a talent that each of us is given in some measure. People who become coaches tend to be gifted listeners to begin with. But listening is also a skill that can be trained and developed. Most

people do not listen at a very deep level. Attention and awareness are very important in life coaching as is also what is done with the listening i.e. the impact one has when one acts on one's listening.

There are said to be 3 levels of listening:

- **Level 1** – internal listening where the focus is on oneself, for example, what does this mean to me?
- **Level 2** – focused listening, where one's awareness is totally on the other person. One listens for their words, their expression, their emotion, everything they bring. One notices what they say and how they say it. One notices what they don't say. One listens for what they value. One listens for their vision, and for what makes them energetic. One listens for what makes them come alive in the coaching session and what makes them go dead and withdraw. At Level 2, the impact of the listening is on the speaker, the coach is simply a mirror. Most coaching happens at Level 2.
- **Level 3** – is global listening, where the coach listens at 360 degrees. It may be described as being like radio waves. Level 3 listening gives greater access to the coach's intuition, receiving information that is not directly observable. At Level 3, intuition simply gives more information to the coach.

Everything in coaching hinges on listening with the client's agenda and the following questions in mind:

- Are they on track with their vision?
- Are they honouring their values?
- Where are they during this session?

As a life coach I would apply all of the above to a six week session with a person. This would be enough to get over the hump of a problem, more than a quick fix solution, and it can be very beneficial before exams (see Appendix for case studies). However, I have found that when the client really wants to turn their life around, they need twelve sessions

So, in conclusion, life coaching aims to help the client take a journey from uncertainty about their present state on that wheel of life and their not knowing what the next step may be, through to having a clear vision of something that is absolutely right for them, and a plan for how to create it.