

HONG KONG COACHING COMMUNITY



What is Coaching?

How Coaching is Different from Counseling, Consulting, Training and NLP

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According to Merriam-Webster the word 'coach' derives from the German word Kutsche which is "a large usually closed 4-wheeled carriage having doors in the sides and generally a front and a back seat inside and an elevated seat in front for the driver." Now you may wonder how a 4-wheeled carriage is related to the modern meaning of a coach for personal or professional development.

The carriage actually can serve as a metaphor for coaching: it helps people get from A to B faster than they would get there walking by themselves. Equally, a personal or corporate coach helps you to achieve your objectives faster than you would 'walking' by yourself.

Coaching & Counseling

This leads me to the first distinction, the main difference between coaching and counseling. While counseling focuses on dealing with deeply rooted problems, coaching typically is more forward-oriented, i.e. the main focus is on discovering and realizing opportunities rather than overcoming serious problems. Occasionally a coach needs to deal with problems as well, however, if they are psychologically deeply rooted, it is recommended for the coach to refer his client to a qualified counselor or therapist.

Coaching & Consulting

Since coaching is not a protected profession, pretty much anyone can adopt the title of a coach. With coaching becoming some kind of a buzzword, unfortunately, some counselors, consultants and trainers do

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exactly that without having undergone any formal coach-specific training. Therefore, let's explore further differences between these professions.

For example, how is a personal consultant different from a personal coach? To get a clear understanding, let's have a look at how a consultant normally works.

A consultant is typically the expert in a certain field, for example a leadership consultant should be a leadership expert. Being asked to help improve a leader's ability to lead, he analyzes the existing leadership competencies of his client and compares them with the desirable competencies for a certain position. He comes to his findings through analysis combined with his expertise. Based on these findings, the consultant gives recommendations and advises what to change for his client to become a more effective leader.

A coach chooses a different approach. He helps the client find out for her or himself what is the most desirable outcome and how it can be achieved. The coach's role in this process is to facilitate this discovery, challenging the coachee to raise the standards and encouraging her or him to actually take the action needed to reach the desired outcome.

A key difference between these approaches is 'ownership'. In the case of the consulting approach, the consultant 'owns' the ideas and solutions. In the case of coaching the client owns them. Accordingly, the motivation of actually putting these solutions into action will be greater.

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It becomes obvious that coaching is a more effective approach if chances are good that the client can develop effective solutions through the coaching process. However, if very specific knowledge is required which the client can't reasonably develop her or himself, then consulting is a very appropriate approach. In fact, many coaches effectively use a combination of both approaches.

Coaching & Training

Training is similar to consulting in that the trainer is also supposed to be an expert in her field. Simply put, based on her knowledge and experience, a trainer typically explains how to do things in the "right way", then perhaps demonstrates it and then lets her trainees practice the new behavior and helps them make adjustments where necessary.

The traditional training approach is very effective for the development of hard skills while coaching is considerably more effective when attempting to develop soft skills.

Why is that so?

The 'problem' with soft skills is that everybody has them to a greater or lesser extent. For example, success in sales is to a large extent dependent on soft skills like the ability to communicate, perseverance, ability to build rapport, etc. In a classroom setting, participants have different levels of development of these soft skills. Hence, a linear training approach is bound to yield only modest improvements since it can't effectively address the diversity of skill levels. A group coaching approach is much more effective as it helps the individuals in the

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classroom to develop their soft skill levels from the inside out and adjusted to their idiosyncratic situations.

Obviously coaching requires a set of specific skills to effectively lead this process. Coaching puts much more emphasis on listening and questioning as opposed to teaching. Coaching is an ongoing process that supports the coachee to implement new skills in their real life situations, while training is generally a discrete event. Coaching focuses on individual mindsets and situations whereas training addresses group knowledge gaps.

Coaching & NLP

Similar to coaching, NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) became another buzzword over the past few years. The internationally recognized NLP trainer and developer John McWhirter defined NLP as follows:

“NLP is about replicating success, achieving success consistently.”

This definition shows that NLP – unlike counseling, consulting, training or coaching – is not a specific approach but rather consists of a set of techniques that help its practitioners to be more successful in a chosen area. As a consequence, certain NLP techniques can be effectively used by all these professions.

For example, the technique of reframing is useful for both counselors and coaches to shift the client’s perspective of a failure by reframing it as a learning opportunity. Highly successful people don’t consider

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negative results as failures but as opportunities for great learning and growth leading to more success in the future.

NLP can be applied in the coaching process to help the coachee achieve systematically more successful outcomes.

Conclusion: Counseling, consulting, training and coaching use different approaches to achieve successful outcomes. Depending on the situation and the desired results, one of these approaches tends to be more appropriate and effective than the others. NLP is a set of techniques that can be meaningfully integrated into all of these approaches, but is not a comprehensive approach in itself.

The upcoming Speed Coaching Day organized by the Hong Kong Coaching Community on 19 November provides a unique opportunity to experience individual and group coaching. Some of the speed coaches are also experienced counselors, consultants, trainers or NLP specialists.

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