

The Next Professional Wave

CONSULTANT/COACH

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Today, perhaps more than ever before, outside resources are being engaged to help organizations cope with downsizing, mergers, reengineering, savvy consumers, and heightened competition. Worries about recruitment and retention of key people, meeting employee and customer needs, and keeping up with the rapid rate of change are daily issues. For consultants, this period of demand constitutes both a boon as well as a challenge: how to incorporate the many advances in skills and technologies to stay competitive and in order to serve clients better?

Many reputable consultants are choosing to remain current by adding a coaching component to their repertoire of services. One of them is renowned leadership authority, Ken Blanchard, who recently launched a coaching company called Coaching.com, which provides professional coaching services to leaders. Its coaches work with leaders who attend a training session and who then practice and receive feedback as they integrate the new skills into their work. The Coaching.com model is in keeping with a recent study¹ that found that training alone increased productivity by 22% while training plus coaching increased productivity by 88%.

This article examines consulting and coaching. We analyze how the two professions are similar and different and identify how, when carefully blended together, they can offer clients the best from both areas of expertise, depending on the circumstances and need.

Consulting vs. Coaching

It is estimated that there are currently more than 200,000 management consulting firms in the United States.² As defined by the Institute of Management Consultants (U.S.), management consulting is:

the provision of independent advice and assistance to clients with management responsibilities.

Consultants typically perform any one or more of the following: provide information, diagnose and/or solve problems, recommend actions, implement changes, build consensus and commitment, and facilitate client organization learning.³ In his best-selling book, *Million Dollar Consulting: The Professional's Guide to Growing a Practice*, Alan Weiss expands the definition to include providing a specialized expertise, content, behavior, skill, or other resources to assist in improving the condition of the client.

Coaches are also in the business of improving the condition of their clients. The International Coach Federation (ICF), founded in 1992, is the coach-credentialing body and is widely recognized as the primary worldwide resource for business and personal coaches. The ICF defines coaching as:

an ongoing relationship that focuses on clients taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals, or desires.

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*Already
cousins in
the family
of advisors,
consultants
and coaches
may on
occasion
merge into
one.*

Today there are an estimated 10,000 full- and part-time coaches in the United States, another 5,000 internationally.⁴ That number is growing steadily, with coaches being used in public and private organizations around the world. The leaders of organizations such as Alcoa, American Red Cross, AT&T, Ford, Northwestern Mutual Life, 3M, United Parcel Service, American Standard, the federal governments of Canada and the United States, and numerous high-tech firms are convinced that coaching works to develop people and increase productivity.

In organizational coaching, there appears to be a number of common methods employed. The “coach approach”⁵ stems from an employee setting goals based on self-awareness, performance, career expectations, and the organization’s priorities. Self-awareness is the foundation of goal setting in coaching. It is grounded in introspection and knowledge gathered from assessments (such as 360-degree feedback mechanisms, communication style indexes, and personality profiles) of personal strengths and areas for improvement. Once goals have been set, coaches support the individual or team in making progress toward achieving their desired results.

Consulting and coaching share a number of common attributes:

- As outside professional resources, they act as change agents in the organization.
- Each requires a high level of expertise and training; *for consulting*: subject-matter expertise, knowledge of methodology and its applications, client business practices, client products, and services; *for coaching*: coaching skills and methodology training, certification in key competencies, and professional credentials.
- Each requires competence in the following skills: listening, observation, giving feedback, data analysis, intervention, and process facilitation.
- Each provides services to support transformation, either individual or organizational; both roles are based on fulfilling client needs and supporting their success.

- Each is engaged either to develop a particular skill set within a team or because the higher productivity needed to achieve desired results is more probable through the use of an outside rather than an internal resource.
- Services provided vary widely, as do fees paid, gaps or issues that are addressed, competence of service providers, and measurable results.
- Both work at the level of individuals, teams, and organizations and involve two-way interaction between the professional and the client.
- The outcome and results belong to the client, who is responsible for implementing any action during or following the provision of service.

Perhaps the most striking difference between consulting and coaching is the process that each follows in order to serve as change agent and support a client’s achieving desired results.

Consultants are in the business of providing expert advice. They identify a problem with a client and then resolve it through activities that can include option analysis, facilitation, training, and the like. Some may focus more on a “process” approach, aiding clients to work through issues. *Coaches* work with clients who identify their own issues or goals—asking questions and giving feedback so that clients discover their own solutions. According to the International Coach Federation:

[Coaches use] a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client’s level of awareness and responsibility and provide the client with structure, support, and feedback. The coaching process helps clients both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise.

Purists would keep the roles distinct: Coaches ask and evoke; consultants tend to tell

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and solve. Others see a benefit to blending the two to provide added value to clients.

Consultant/Coaches

Many consulting firms are now blending coaching skills into their practices with excellent results. Providers of coaching services include, for example, KRW International and Keilty, Goldsmith & Company. Client organizations include American Express, BellSouth, Canadian International, Motorola, McKinsey, and Quest-Wireless. According to KRW International, this process involves:

[Helping] individuals (1) align their hearts, heads, and souls in all aspects of their influence and decision making; (2) honor the interconnectedness of the world; (3) seek sustainable solutions; and (4) share the values of integrity, responsibility, and compassion.⁶

According to Doug Rachford, senior partner at QED, LLC, the process of blending the two professions can be a natural progression:

We usually are hired to consult and end up coaching. Frequently we follow the consulting with help in the implementation. Often we ask the clients questions that make them think through their problems, and we gently assist them in discovering solutions. We also focus on developing self and organizational awareness. It is important that there be a level of trust between the client and the coach.

For those professionals or companies that want to follow suit and offer a blended consulting/coaching service, there are some steps that can be taken to increase the synergy between the two:

1. Learn to distinguish when each is appropriate, and be able to speak knowledgeably about the appropriateness of each intervention.
2. Align the goals of consultants and coaches with those of the organization.
3. Ensure that highly qualified professionals are hired by bringing in only those who have

the appropriate training and credentials from recognized professional associations. For coaches this includes the International Coach Federation (www.coachfederation.org), and for independent consultants the Institute of Management Consultants (www.imcusa.org). It is recommended that coaches complete an accredited training program.

4. With the client, set desired outcomes and monitor performance and results.
5. Ensure strong, visible championing of the initiative and of the chosen professionals.
6. Be patient. Creating change can be abrupt; transitions take time.

Conclusion

As the profession of coaching continues to grow and get attention, we are likely to see more consultants adding coaching skills to their menu of services. Likewise, as coaches specialize and develop niches, they too will likely add consulting skills to their menu of services. The evolution of both professions will provide added value for professionals who want to tailor the services they provide to fit the exact needs of the client. ■

Notes

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