

## ASSISTING THE HIGH-POWERED

### Do you need a life coach? TR helps you make an executive decision.

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Many of the world's most successful men have smartly assembled a support team to help them execute their ambitious visions. These individuals rely on, trust in and understand the values of partnership. After all, it was steel magnate Andrew Carnegie who said, "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision." Perhaps because behind every individual success story there is a right-hand man that helped script it, it was only a matter of time before "life coaching" would enter the mainstream. Particularly effective in the corporate world, it is no coincidence that executive coaching has propelled some of the world's top CEOs to new heights. That is to say nothing of coaching's corporate beneficiaries—JP Morgan Chase, American Express and G.E. among them—as well as star athletes, high-profile celebrities and the everyday Joe.

But just because "How to Win Friends and Influence People" is among your favorite books, you listen to motivational speakers with keen interest, or bawl at the end of "Rudy" does not mean you need life coaching. It does, however, indicate an interest in self-improvement. To help determine the ways you might benefit from life coaching, first understand specifically what it is that you want to achieve, which might be anything from accomplishing a career goal or learning to approach life more positively, to better manage spending, conquer a bad habit, or build more fulfilling relationships. Next, find a life coach to mentor you during the process; one who will create manageable steps designed to help you to achieve your overall goal, while monitoring your progress and motivating you to develop consistent, results-producing behaviors.

#### The coach

Mickey Parsons, an Atlanta-based master certified coach whose practice, Parsons Associates Coaching, and its corporate division, The Workplace Coach, provides a variety of coaching services (life, career, health, business and executive) for individuals and corporate clients, says that coaching is practical, actionable and provides unlimited constructive value. As a coach, consultant and workshop leader for more than 50 Fortune 500 companies, including the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and Turner Broadcasting, Parsons serves as a sounding board for clients who seek his services, providing them with honest feedback, encouragement, fresh perspectives, new concepts and process methodologies designed to enact measurable change.

"Credentialed coaches are often highly skilled and resourceful individuals who draw upon their own life experiences and those as a coach, personal and professional networks, intuition and their understanding of a client's goals, needs and aspirations to help [that individual] succeed," says Parsons, who is often hired to sharpen one's leadership skills; help an organization correct management behavior problems or to ensure the success of newly promoted managers; improve a company's employee relations; help a client with a career change, or build a management plan.

Because there are several different schools of life coaching (see sidebar), it is not uncommon for life coaches to have a specialization, whether it be executive, business, transitional, health, sports, or conflict coaching to name a few.

#### The process

According to the International Coach Federation, "Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential." In this regard, coaching is even helpful for individuals who society has already deemed phenomenally successful. Partnering with an external confidant to help synergize one's goals and dreams is helpful for anyone at any stage of their development.

From a business perspective, many clients seek skill acquisition in leadership, time and priority management, on-boarding in a new position, or support during a career transition. Coaches like Parsons collaborates with clients to architect custom "strategies and structures" to move them forward in these and other endeavors. In addition to conducting regular client sessions, Parsons says that coaches commonly provide clients with email support, resources, articles, useful contacts, checklists, relevant assessments, etc. Different coaches follow different coaching models created to move clients from their current situation to goal achievement. "We do this by jointly setting the coaching

agenda and field tasks or homework assignments between sessions,” says Parsons, regarding the corporate conversation model he personally enlists. “During in-person or phone sessions we establish focus and goals for our time together, and work together to discover possibilities and plan strategies and action steps.” In addition, Parsons addresses clients’ potential “barriers to success” and supportive “accountability structures.”

Goal-setting is central to the coaching process. Serving as a roadmap to one’s success, outlining goals helps clients to focus, eventually leading them to where they want to be. It is also a great way to measure success. Because goal-setting figures so prominently into a productive coaching experience, goals are typically established within the first month of coaching.

Although coaching hinges on a working partnership between the assistor and assisted, it is important to recognize the differences between coaching and traditional therapy. Coaching is action-oriented. Because it is present and future-focused, coaching is not suited for individuals facing emotional crisis or struggling with serious psychological issues that make it difficult for them to function normally. Therapy seeks to resolve these issues by investigating past experiences to resolve current ills.

### **The partnership**

The coach and client relationship is productive, proactive and collaborative, and therefore extremely motivating. It is similar to the relationship between a sports coach and an athlete in that a life coach provides his client with specific steps and performance-based techniques to overcome challenges and achieve goals.

“It is a relationship based on mutual respect, honesty and transparent dialogue where the coach provides questions, support, insights and challenges, and also offers observations,” Parsons explains. “For many clients the accountability that the coaching relationship provides is especially energizing. If the client is willing to explore new perspectives, is able to be completely honest, is prepared to change behaviors and has the time, energy and commitment to work between sessions, almost any goal can be achieved and accelerated.”

The coach/client partnership is truly unique in that it demands actionable results. Coaching insists that success be a two-way street. For example, in order for this relationship to yield positive results, clients must first carefully select a coach by thoroughly investigating his candidacy, which means asking for proof of credentials, references, and a private consultation if necessary. Parsons also suggests taking the following steps before making a final selection.

*Be resourceful:* Positive word of mouth from trusted friends and colleagues is a good sign. Refer to online resources and coaching associations such as the International Coach Federation ([coachfederation.org](http://coachfederation.org)) for further information.

*Do your homework:* “Although there are some top-quality coaches with no formal training or credentials, it is generally recommended that you hire a coach who meets minimum professional standards and has a solid track record,” says Parsons, who advises asking prospective coaches specific questions, including: What is your experience? How many clients have you coached? What unique strengths will you bring to the process? What did you do before you became a coach? What results should I expect? What type of support do you provide between sessions?

*Trust your intuition:* Chemistry is crucial. If you do not feel a connection with a prospective coach, developing a trusting, respectful relationship with that person is unlikely. So, if you do not have a clear picture of a prospective coach’s overall approach or are the least bit uncomfortable, keep looking.

Coaching can help those who are truly invested in their future and their development. For example, in this stagnant economy, when companies are less forgiving about mistakes and failures but expect more from its employees, senior executives are under an exorbitant amount of stress. “Coaches can help executives and leaders during these times by offering fresh perspectives and support, and by exploring new, more efficient ways of maximizing personal and team productivity,” Parsons explains. “When every minute and every decision counts, it’s more important than ever to have someone on your side that you can be open with, and perhaps more importantly, who will be 100 percent honest with you about what they see and hear, and what they don’t.”

## SIDEBAR: **What's Your Type?**

Many professional coaches specialize in one or more areas. To determine which type of coaching will be most effective for you, here is a round-up of the most common areas of specialty:

**Business and Executive Coaching:** Supports organizations in boosting the impact, strength and productivity of business managers, sales personnel and other key players. Coaching can transform managers into great leaders, retain top talent, sharpen managerial skills and foster laser-sharp focus on strategic objectives.

**Corporate Coaching:** Supports businesses, leaders and workplace teams in transforming organizational culture, renewing an organization's mission and/or boosting its bottom line. Other goals may include promoting ideal-sharing, sparking innovation, enhancing communication and restoring employee initiative.

**Career Coaching:** Supports individuals in identifying their ideal career choice, transitioning into a new career, or reinvigorating their chosen career.

**Life/Personal Coaching:** Supports individuals in creating a deeply satisfying, well-balanced life. Clients work toward goals such as more meaningful work, greater self-expression and more fulfilling relationships.

*\* Information contributed by Mickey Parsons with Parsons Associates Coaching. For more information, visit [parsons-associates.com](http://parsons-associates.com) or [theworkplacecoach.com](http://theworkplacecoach.com). Or, email Mickey at [mickey@theworkplacecoach.com](mailto:mickey@theworkplacecoach.com).*