How Do I Get the Most Out of Coaching?

I often get asked - how do I get the most out of coaching and how can I ensure I can sustain the results? This is a very good question. To answer this, I would like to draw on my own experience of being coached.

I have been coached a number of times in my life and these engagements have focused on various topics ranging from work performance, coping with illness in the family to what do I want out of a life partner. Each time, I have benefited greatly from the mindset shift that came as a result of being coached. I hope that through this article, you too can get the most out of your coaching sessions.

Ready, Set, Coach!

A good starting point is having a strong personal reason and purpose to be coached. Identifying the right goal and what you want to get out of coaching is really important. By being clear on what you want out of the coaching engagement is half the battle won. So what makes a good goal?

First, a goal must be something you truly want. If you were to successfully achieve this goal what would it really mean to you? It should be something that is truly important to your core. Second, is it something that is really in line with you, your values and where you want to go in life. Does it sit well with your values and principles? Third, would achieving this goal have an impact on you and those around you in a positive way? What is the ripple effect it could have and could you see attaining that goal as being totally worth the effort?

That's not to say that a goal has to be a huge lofty aspiration such as discovering the meaning of life. Great reasons to be coached could be how to manage your emotional state more effectively, figuring out what is the right job for you or even how to improve your relationships with those around you. The most important thing is that your purpose and reason to be coached is meaningful enough to you that you are willing to put in the real effort required to make change happen so as to accomplish your goal.

Be Open

So great, you have a robust personal reason to get coached that is meaningful to you. And you are about to have your first session - now what? Be open. Open to new realisations, new possibilities, new thoughts. Often in our busy lives, we rarely have time to just reflect on what we really want. Let alone, how to get there and how to overcome what will get in the way. During one of my coaching engagements, I came in thinking that the goal was to improve my leadership skills as I was about to step into a regional role.

But as we progressed through the coaching sessions, I realised what was holding me back was not my leadership skills, but things going on in my home situation that was affecting how I was performing at work. Looking back on it now, if I had resisted talking through those personal issues and was not open to exploring those issues below the surface I would not have gotten the most out of my coaching sessions. I would have instead only addressed the superficial issues instead of what was really bothering me and holding me back. It turned out that the home situation and unresolved issues related to it was

seeping into how I ran my team which was holding me back. Sometimes people delineate life versus executive coaching, but in my view they are deeply intertwined.

Being open to where my coaching journey would lead me, allowed me to unpack obstacles that were preventing me from being the best leader I could be at work.

Be Curious

I have 2 young children and it amazes me how they are so curious about everything. Why is the sky blue? How come the light turns on when I flick the switch? As we get older, we can lose this natural curiosity. In the pursuit of the end outcome, we may forget to stop and explore new avenues or options. But when it comes to being coached, it is important to remain curious. During your coaching sessions, you will reach realisations or "ah-ha" moments which are new or surprising to you. Being curious also means that you are open to what these realisations could mean, which could lead to new opportunities.

Curiosity also enhances learning. In fact, neurological studies have shown that curiosity makes our brains more receptive to picking up new things and as we learn, we enjoy the sensation of learning. By approaching our realisations with curiosity and wonder we can glean greater meaning from them. This in turn will allow you to self-reflect and draw out even more insights that will help you on your transformational journey.

Be Ready to Reflect

What happens in between sessions can be just as important as what goes on in your session. During your sessions, you will uncover and explore a number of issues related to your coaching topic. Some of these may be familiar and some of them brand new. And particularly for those new insights and discoveries, take the time to reflect on them. I found that in between my sessions I allowed and made time to reflect on what was discussed. This helped to anchor my realisations which in turn helped me progress towards my goals.

You may find carving out specific time in your schedule works for you. Journalling can also be an excellent way to put down some of your thoughts - whether it be the physical act of writing or typing. I even found the pockets of time in between such as during my morning commute a good time to reflect on my action plans or what came up in my sessions. By reflecting more deeply on my sessions, it allowed me to progress faster towards my end goal and it allowed me the space to analyse and evaluate where I wanted to go next. Self-reflection leads directly to self-development.

Be Prepared for Change

I'm sure all of us have gone through some exercise during training courses on change. Like the one where you wear your watch on the opposite wrist you usually do. Or you fold your arms that way that feels most natural to you, then being asked to switch. What is the point that is being made? Simply, change can be uncomfortable at the start. But in the end, it starts feeling like this is the way things have always been.

For example, when I established in my coaching sessions that there were certain behaviours I needed to change, initially it was very hard for me to do. These were behaviours that I had gotten used to and had become part of how I regularly interacted with people. And making the first step to do things differently was hard. It also took time and practice. With a little patience, support from my coach and effort on my part, eventually my new behaviour became a part of my modus operandi. So the lesson here is to be ready for change. Embrace it as that is why you are on this personal coaching journey. It will feel uncomfortable at first, but

eventually, it will become second nature to you..

Be Accountable

No pain, no gain they say. I'm not suggesting that accountability is painful, but it does require effort and commitment. After all, you have invested your time and heart into exploring what needs to change in your life for the better, now it's up to you to make it happen. Your coach will work with you to design your action plan after each session. You will also walk through what pitfalls could derail you and how to overcome them. You have also clarified what resources and support is needed to implement your plans. Now it's up to you. I've left coaching sessions really motivated only to feel a little less brave the next day. Somehow it seemed so simple to identify the necessity of having "that" conversation with a difficult colleague during my coaching session, but seems daunting when back at work. But I had to steel myself to just do it. Otherwise, how was I going to really progress? Most importantly, if I didn't stick to what I said I would do I would only be letting myself down. And if you can't achieve the actions you set out to do? Then, maybe it wasn't the right step at that point in time and reflect on that. The most important thing is you take ownership and accountability for your own transformation and change. Your coach will be in your corner, but you need to step up and take action.

Go For It!

Finally, don't hesitate. If you want to make a change in your life and are willing to consider coaching as a means to do so, you are already halfway there. Coaching can transform your mindset from one that holds you back to one that opens up exciting new possibilities. By having a positive mindset your can unlock your hidden potential, remove obstacles that are in your way or even give you new perspectives on where you want to go with your life or career. But in the end, you are in the driving seat.

Your coach is your cheerleader, your pacer and in your corner. Ultimately though, what you get out of coaching is what you put in. Be open and curious on this exciting journey you are about to embark upon. Work with your coach to have a clear vision on what you want to achieve and put in the commitment to stick to your action plan and the sky truly is the limit.

As you progress towards your goals, you will not be asking how to sustain these changes as it will be part of a transformation which you have driven, worked for and can now reap the benefits from.



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