

Professional Coaching Language for Greater Public Understanding[©]

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INTRODUCTION

The Profession of Coaching is not Clearly Understood by the Public

Despite an estimated 20 years of business existence and practice, the profession of coaching clearly remains in its infancy. Although many people in the United States are beginning to hear about personal and business coaches, the vast majority of the public is still unknowledgeable about what a coach actually **does**. More often than not, coaching is (incorrectly) understood by an unknowing public to be a *virtual version* of modern therapy; this misperception and comparison may be attributed to the public's face value recognition that regular, on-going meetings with a coach look like therapy "sessions."

The Evolution of Business Coaching

Coaching has been conducted in the business world for a long time, as consultants have worked with CEO's, executives and their business teams. Utilizing and combining the processes of business coaching and consulting, strategic and action planning activities often naturally address individual behaviors, motivation, and related personal improvement. As a result of its evolutionary process, coaching has expanded from the business environment to the "life" environment where similar action-oriented work with the coach addresses matters outside the work environment.

Personal and Life Coaching

The natural outgrowth and extension of this business-related work is known as personal or life coaching, which includes a more encompassing focus on an individual's life as it relates to goal setting, outcome creation and personal change management. It is perhaps from this broader focus that confusion arises for those who are unfamiliar with coaching. In the public's earnest effort to get a handle on what a coach does, misleading comparisons are quickly drawn to the therapeutic process, mainly because of the following personal service similarities:

- *Service Delivery Method* - regular face-to-face or telephone meetings
- *Content* – work and life challenges that an individual faces that often require change initiative and management
- *Activities performed by the Professional Coach* – interactive dialog, intuitive listening, sounding board feedback, client acknowledgment, etc.

Therefore, in order for knowledge to reach and benefit the end consumer, it is critical that increased efforts be made to distinguish, clarify, and honor the two professions so that the consumer can choose the most effective and appropriate service as dictated by individual life circumstances.

The ICF: Holding the Vision for a Self-Regulating Profession

The International Coach Federation (ICF) is the professional association of personal and business coaches that seeks to preserve the integrity of coaching around the globe. In order for the profession of coaching to continue to grow and dynamically create itself so that it can best serve all coaches and their clients, the ICF believes that coaching needs to remain a self-regulated profession. To that end, it is **vital** that COACHES learn to communicate to their prospects, their clients, the public and the media in a language that does not confuse our profession with other seemingly “like” professions.

A NEW WAY OF LANGUAGING OUR PROFESSION Observations and Suggestions for Coaches

The ICF Regulatory Committee has requested that I begin the process of investigating our use of coaching language as it relates to the mental health profession. I have listed my initial observations and suggestions. By no means is this document meant to be definitive, nor is the intent to rob anything from the wonderful PROCESS of coaching. The goal is to examine how we communicate what we DO so that we differentiate and distinguish ourselves in the most powerful self-regulating frame.

1. IDENTIFY & RECLASSIFY COACHING AS A NEW PROFESSION

DON'T CALL COACHING: A “Helping Profession”

DO CALL COACHING: A Personal Development Profession
A Professional Development Profession
A Personal Growth Profession
A Self Improvement Profession

2. DECLARE THAT COACHING IS NOT THERAPY

Many coaches spend a great portion of their introduction time talking to and educating the public as to the differences between coaching and therapy. This runs several risks:

- We confuse the public more.
- We focus our discussion on a dissertation of therapy and coaching principles.
- We defend coaching.
- We collapse the two professions.
- We try to justify why some people see both professionals at the same time.
- We make therapy wrong and coaching right.
- We enter discussions of defending why we aren't licensed.

When a person tells you that coaching sounds like therapy, you can clarify and gently redirect *your* discussion to let them know it's NOT therapy, and that it's a *new profession* based in personal growth and client initiated change. (See # 1 above for other ways to language the profession.)

3. SPEAK ABOUT COACHING RESULTS AS NON-FEELING BASED RESULTS

Many of our clients experience a greater sense of well being after being coached and often *feel better* after a coaching call. As great as that is, that is not our primary intent as coaches. Our work is focused on the ability and willingness of our clients to **MOVE FORWARD AND TAKE ACTION**. The results of personal/life coaching are frequently likened to typical outcomes of therapy. Avoid making promises that imply *resultant feeling/emotional states or potential outcomes from improved mental health*, such as:

- A more fulfilled life
- A happier life
- A wonderful life
- A perfect life
- A healed life
- Healthier and happier relationships*

*A distinction should be drawn between relationship counseling and relationship coaching. Generally speaking, relationship counseling is a therapeutic process that is oriented towards and focuses on the healing of pain, dysfunction and conflict within a relationship. Relationship counseling is performed by licensed counselors. Relationship coaching focuses on identifying and clarifying the current goals of a relationship with an emphasis on action, accountability and follow through.

4. SPEAK ABOUT YOUR COACHING BUSINESS IN TERMS OF YOUR BUSINESS/CLIENTS/CLIENTELE - NOT YOUR “COACHING PRACTICE”

Medical and mental health professionals often refer to their client base as their *practice*. While that is true of consultants as well, the term “consulting” is perceived as more of a business-oriented activity. When you talk about your work and the people who pay you, talk about your Coaching *Business*, Coaching *Clients*, and your Coaching *Clientele*. This will help alleviate the confusion between the *Practitioners* of physical and mental health services - many of whom are required to be licensed by state regulatory agencies.

5. USE “WELCOME PACKET” INSTEAD OF INTAKE PACKET

When beginning your first work with a client, use language that speaks to the *first meeting, first call, or initial appointment*. If you send them a starting package of materials, call it a *welcome packet*. Intake and intake sessions are often processes associated with the mental health and social service fields.

6. EMPHASIZE *CLIENT-INITIATED* ACTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Coaching is unique in the manner in which the client interacts with the professional; the client is the driver in this professional relationship. It is the client who makes the final decision on and initiates the appropriate action. It is the client who agrees to abide by a system of accountability with the goal of being self-responsible and true to one’s word. The coach fulfills the role of a facilitator in this process so that the client can fully empower him/herself.

7. TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU DO AND HOW YOU DO IT, WHILE USING TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH PROFESSIONAL COACHING LANGUAGE, INSTEAD OF PSYCHOTHERAPY LANGUAGE

Obviously, an individual profession cannot claim ownership of language. It is helpful and useful for coaches to know the differences between what language is generally used in the realm of therapy as well as in coaching. Therefore, I have listed words that are associated in the general domain of each profession. The following lists are certainly not exhaustive. They are intended to educate the public by distinguishing the respective expertise of both professions.

Psychotherapy Language	Coaching Language
<p>Verbs Unearth Surface Alleviate Expose Intervene Adjust Help/Rescue Heal (discomfort/pain) Confront Diagnose Treat Process (feelings) Induce Manifest (symptoms)</p> <p>Content Issues Attitudes Pain Dysfunction Symptoms & Sources Conditions Disorder Normal/Abnormal Unconscious/Subconscious Low Self worth Mood disorders Anxiety disorders Social disorders Suicide Phobia Addiction Depression</p>	<p>Verbs Focus Prioritize Clarify Measure Move Forward Plan Be Proactive Take Action Achieve Delegate Solve Acknowledge Brainstorm Mind map Request Sort Emphasize Develop Learn Educate Accomplish Target Complete Train Follow-up/Follow through Respond Communicate</p> <p>Content Outcome Positive action steps Accountability Self improvement</p>

Psychotherapy Language	Coaching Language
<p>Content Latent desires Abusive behavior Destructive behavior Recurrent/Repetitive patterns Psychic roots of problems Delusion Types and subtypes of disorders Severity levels Transference Adult/Child behavior Personality disorders Antisocial behavior Chronic behavior Onset Pathology Dependence issues Withdrawal Loneliness and isolation (effects of) Grief (effects and processing of) Disturbance Periods of Panic attacks Obsessive behavior Functioning level Impairment Causation Episodes Trauma Course (of a disorder) Illness Associated features (of a disorder or disease) Clinical</p>	<p>Content Results Self-responsibility Projects Measurement Problems Skills development Money management Systems Organization Management Interpersonal communication skills Intention Purpose Success Balance Choice Options Leadership Actions Tasks Checklists Possibilities Response Integrity Deadline Inquiry Assignments The Follow-up and the Follow-through Goal Setting Vision and mission Prompted self-discovery Values Planning Strategies Spiritual development/fulfillment (as a result of actions taken)</p>

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