

While there are some similarities between coaching and counseling, they are very different activities and it is important that you understand the differences between them. Counseling is a health care service and is usually reimbursable through health insurance policies. This is not true for coaching. Both coaching and counseling utilize knowledge of human behavior, motivation and behavioral change, and interactive helping techniques. The major differences are in the goals, focus, and level of professional responsibility.

The focus of coaching is development and implementation of strategies to reach client- identified goals of enhanced performance and personal satisfaction. Coaching may address specific personal projects, life balance, job performance and satisfaction, or general conditions in the client's life, business, or profession. Coaching utilizes personal strategic planning, values clarification, brainstorming, motivational techniques, and other helping techniques.

The focus of counseling is identification, diagnosis, and treatment of mental and nervous disorders. The goals of counseling include alleviating symptoms, understanding the underlying dynamics which create symptoms, changing dysfunctional behaviors which are the result of these disorders, and developing new strategies for successfully coping with the psychological challenges which we all face. Most research on counseling outcomes indicates that the quality of the relationship is most closely correlated with therapeutic progress. Counseling clients are often emotionally vulnerable. This vulnerability is increased by the expectation that they will discuss very intimate personal data and expose feelings about themselves about which they are understandably sensitive. The client's past experiences have often made trust difficult to achieve. These factors give counselors significant power that creates a fiduciary responsibility to protect the safety of their clients and to "above all else, do no harm."

The relationship between the coach and client is specifically designed to avoid the power differentials that occur in the counseling relationship. The client sets the agenda and the success of the enterprise depends on the client's willingness to take risks and try new approaches. The relationship is designed to be more direct and challenging. You can count on your coach to be honest and straightforward, asking powerful questions and using challenging techniques to move you forward. You are expected to evaluate progress and when coaching is not working as you wish, you should immediately inform them so together you and the coach can both take steps to correct the problem.

Because of these differences, the roles of coach and counselor are often in potential conflict and I believe that it is ethically inappropriate for one to play both roles with a client, whether concurrently or sequentially. Positive change is difficult enough without having to worry about role confusion. This means that if either of us recognizes that you have a problem that would benefit from psychotherapeutic intervention, I will refer you to appropriate resources. In some situations, I may insist that you initiate counseling and that I have access to your counselor as a condition of my continuing as your coach.

It is also important to understand that coaching is a professional relationship. While it may often feel like a close personal relationship, it is not one that can extend beyond professional boundaries both during and after our work together. Considerable experience shows that when boundaries blur, the hard won benefits gained from the coaching relationship are endangered.

No information in my coaching services is intended or implied to be a substitute for professional mental health, medical, or legal advice or is meant to replace any of these professional relationships. I recommend that you consult a qualified professional prior to utilizing any of the information provided by me during any of my coaching services.