

The Value of Emotional Intelligence in Professional Coaching

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Introduction

Professional coaching is a gift. It shows that the organization believes in employees and wishes to invest in them, helping them become the best version of themselves. Twenty years ago, someone selected to receive coaching might think, “Uh-oh. If I’m getting a coach, that must mean there’s something wrong with me that needs fixing.” Fortunately, that is an antiquated view. Now, that person is much more likely to think, “I’m doing really well, and to do even better and advance in my career, coaching is a wonderful tool I can use to help me achieve and become my best self.” That “best self” is not limited to a person’s professional life, either; coaching can also be a tremendous boon to their personal development.

As a certified professional coach with a focus in emotional intelligence (EI), I believe it is difficult to overstate the value of coaching. A good coach enables clients to set achievable goals while addressing their strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, an emotional intelligence coach helps clients shift their existing mindset in order to better position themselves for advancement—in career and life.

Anyone who has thought about hiring a professional coach undoubtedly has many questions. This white paper will address those concerns and provide advice for finding the right coach. I emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence and coaching in a world that is dramatically changing, with higher stress levels at work as well as higher levels of employee depression and anxiety.¹ How will leaders respond to those challenges, especially as younger generations enter the workforce?

Professional Coaching Defined

Before we talk about its importance, it might be helpful to understand what professional coaching is. By definition, professional coaching is a guided process in which a client partners with their coach to become more effective in one or more areas of life, whether professional or a personal. The coach provides support through the transition, as the client moves from where they currently are to where they want to be. At its best, professional coaching can be a

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transformational process—at any stage of one’s career. Coaching can address a gap in skills or a failure to advance, but it is also beneficial when the client is already high-performing and ready to take their performance to the next level.

While some forms of professional coaching resemble cognitive behavior therapy, the practice differs in its execution. Therapy looks deeply at the past and examines events in the client’s life that have shaped their current behaviors. Coaching might touch upon past experiences, but it focuses more on forward-thinking, change, momentum, and movement. It is much more oriented towards goal-setting and action-planning for the purpose of gaining a desired change. I have had clients who came to me for professional coaching and, after going through the process of discovering what exactly they wanted to achieve, decided that clinical therapy would help. In those scenarios, my role was very finite and specific: I helped them gain confidence, clarity, and focus so they could make decisions about the personal parts of their lives.

Why Engage a Coach?

Research shows that professionals who receive coaching are much more likely to be successful and advance in their careers. Nor is that limited to individuals. Coaching is also very popular with teams because organizations have become flat and project-based. Teams that receive coaching are much more productive, have better communication skills, and are higher-performing. Performance relies heavily on focus. When I work with leaders and teams, they are often well aware that they have, for example, poor communication skills. They just have not been able to change that behavior. Coaching helps the client focus and understand not just why they are not being effective, but also the underlying factors—such as perceptions, values, and beliefs—that prevent them from making lasting change.

For those who wish to engage with a coach, the first step is to identify specific areas that could benefit from new strategies and approaches. An individual, for example, might need to work on self-trust, while team members must learn to trust others. Professional coaches are trained to listen and ask powerful questions that help guide clients to their own conclusions. To some, this might sound like something people can do on their own just by sitting and thinking. However, it is very difficult to step outside oneself and examine oneself objectively for the sake

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of deep reflection. Many coaches use journaling to encourage self-examination, but getting to the core issues usually requires a trained professional who can ask the right questions. Coaches help clients explore their innate talents and deepest desires, changing their perspective and fostering new mental habits. For most, that is a life-changing experience.

Developing new mental habits can be challenging on one's own. After all, we are merely human, and it is human nature to slip back into old habits. It is time to engage with a coach when those old habits are not working anymore—or when the client has high aspirations as yet unfulfilled. The issue is not necessarily the client's ability to perform in their role; they probably know how to do their job. Instead, questions might include how well do they work with others? How is the team led? Where does the team get its drive, direction, and vision? Those are all “people” issues that professional coaches are specifically trained to address.

An individual might consider professional coaching if they wish to explore their own potential or become more agile. Perhaps they want to be more mindful or reflective, seeking answers to deep questions such as, “Who am I? Who am I at work? As a leader? Who do I want to be?” In all of those scenarios, coaching can help.

What Clients Can Expect When They Engage with a Coach

The coach's first priority is to determine exactly what the client hopes to achieve at the end of the process. Those goals must be clearly defined before the actual coaching process can begin. Then coach and client together develop a “road map” that outlines expectations and establishes specific steps for achieving goals. Following this road map, coaching strategies may vary from session to session. Some will involve feedback and assessment, while others focus on the client's goals for themselves or their teams. The road map should also address details and logistics, including frequency and duration of meetings as well as whether the client will have “homework” between sessions. Overall, the road map sets a direction for the coaching process while establishing clear metrics for determining success. At the end, both client and coach should be able to definitively measure progress.

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Finding a Coach: What to Look For

Most importantly, a professional coach should be certified through the International Coaching Federation (ICF). Anyone interested in seeking a coach can consult a local ICF chapter to find qualified individuals in their area. Certification through this leading international organization means that coaches adhere to an ethical code and follow professional standards, such as the road map discussed above. The ICF-certified coach has also demonstrated certain core competencies, including the ability to establish trust and confidentiality, use active listening and powerful questions, help the client go from awareness to insight, decide action steps and strategies, plan goals, and manage accountability with the client.

To become certified by ICF, the coach commits to a six-to-eighteen-month training program that could cost as much as \$10,000. After certification, the coach must engage in continuing education and periodic re-certification with ICF. Thus, coaches make significant upfront and ongoing investments in order to earn and retain ICF certification. Additionally, the ICF consistently engages in research and shares results with their members. That means clients who seek ICF-certified coaches will be connecting with the highest-caliber individuals in the field who are demonstrably trained and educated to deliver quality coaching.

Coach-client compatibility is another important factor. Sometimes, taking the time to review a coach's website, CV, and biography will help prospective clients gain a better understanding of how well they may or may not work with that coach. The client must feel completely comfortable with a coach and trust that person implicitly. Before making any commitments, coach and client may also engage in a "discovery conversation" to determine whether they "click" and can envision a strong relationship. Feeling a personal affinity towards a coach is certainly helpful.

Beyond the personal level, however, some coaches may simply be more compatible with a client because of their previous professional experience. While a trained and certified coach should be able to work with anyone, they may have more expertise in certain areas. That is often the case with executive, business or entrepreneurial coaches, where the process focuses more on business acumen and practices than on the person.

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The Emotional Intelligence Difference

Just as coaches have different expertise, they can also have different methods or specialties that influence the way they work with clients. In my case, I am certified in emotional intelligence assessments including the EQ-I 2.0®, ESCI®, ELI®, and TESI®. In particular, I am fascinated by the neuroscience behind emotional and social intelligence and how it impacts our leadership. That is reflected in my coaching practices.

Emotions impact every aspect of life. All behaviors, thoughts, perceptions, and paradigms stem from emotions. I harness emotional energy in my coaching process by helping clients understand the neuroscience—how their brain functions drive their emotions, choices, structures, and responses. This enables them to see how those responses influence their perceptions, thoughts, actions, behaviors, and biases. That is the foundation of my coaching. Using an EQ assessment to establish a baseline lets the client identify areas where they are most effective and least effective and see *why*. I prompt my clients to ask penetrating questions like, “What does this mean in terms of my own self-awareness and how I interact with others? How I make decisions? How I lead change? How is this all impacting my work?”

Emotional intelligence is not about personality or whether a client is introverted or extroverted. Instead, it is about the way someone thinks and responds based on their mindset. My approach might differ from that of an executive coach who looks at things through the lens of strategic thinking, communication skills, hiring practices, and delegation. EI delves deeper, examining the client’s fundamental thinking, which is driven by their neurochemical responses.

The Importance of Professional Coaching and Emotional Intelligence Today

The way we interact with and focus on people at work is changing. In the near future, as the next generation enters the workforce, leaders will have to lead very differently. That will require a completely different skill set and a great deal of emotional agility.

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Coaching is going to become more and more important. Research shows that rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and PTSD at work are the highest ever seen. Specifically, according to a Global EAP analyses², depression is up by 58%, anxiety 74%, and stress 28%. Depression and anxiety are the leading causes of FMLA absences, accounting for 82.6% of all employee health cases. Furthermore, the generation now graduating and entering the workforce is the most depressed, anxious, and suicidal in history. One in five college students is depressed³. Consider that in the annual World Happiness Report rankings, the United States actually fell from #18 to #19, meaning as a country we are becoming collectively less happy⁴. Leaders and employees alike must gain emotional strength and agility if they are to navigate these difficult times.

The need for great professional coaching is clear, and the benefits of engaging with a coach are significant. Fortunately, there are resources, such as the ICF, to ensure that individuals find the best coach for them, one who will help them attain measurable success. To learn more about my coaching, visit www.theicoach.com to find an ICF certified coach, visit www.coachfederation.org.

About The Author

Susan Clarine, Associate Certified Professional Coach and Certified Professional Coach, is fascinated by emotional intelligence and the neuroscience behind it. She believes deeply in EI's ability to create better leaders, more engaged teams, and healthier, happier workplaces. That belief led her to launch The EI Coach, LLC. Susan is an MHS Adjunct Facilitator and Master EQ-I Coach/Trainer who certifies coaches, consultants and human resource professionals in the EQ-I 2.0.

Susan's unique talent for helping managers and teams learn and apply the principles of emotional intelligence enables clients to increase engagement, build more trusting relationships, make better decisions, and lead change with positive energy. Her approach draws upon 20 years of experience in performance consulting, organizational development, talent management and executive coaching in a variety of industries including financial services, technology, manufacturing, healthcare, and higher education.

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As an Energy Leadership Master Practitioner™ her life coaching clients know Susan's passion for helping others lead lives full of insight, positive energy and happiness.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/20/business/silicon-valley-therapy-anxiety.html>

² <https://www.workplaceoptions.com/polls/analysis-of-global-eap-data-reveals-huge-rise-in-depression-stress-and-anxiety-over-past-three-years/>

³ <https://hms.harvard.edu/news/college-stress>

⁴ <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019/>