

COACHING FOR THE BUSINESS OWNER

You remember Coach, right? Nice guy dressed in polyester track pants wearing a whistle around his neck, reminding you to keep your head up and work hard. Well, Coach has left the track and come into the office.

Most business owners have consultants for various areas of their business. They use accountants and lawyers, advertising agencies and financial planners. Now they're using coaches. One of the new kind of coaches is Jennifer Corbin, Director of Student Services/Int'l Affairs for Coach University, and herself a coach who especially works with partnerships.

"As long as I can remember, people have used me as resource or referral bank, or simply a "safe zone," says Corbin. If it sounds a lot like being a good friend, Corbin admits there are some similarities, but also some big differences.

According to Corbin, coaches must be more objective than friends could be, and they're not looking for anything. Sometimes, Corbin says, friends can be jealous of your achievements, or even if unwillingly, they can laugh at your deepest dreams.

The professional skills of trained coaches help people discover what they feel they *should* be doing,

and then they get them doing it for a more rewarding life. "As a friend, you can offer support, but it's more difficult to offer constructive criticism and advice."

For most professional coaches, training is done at Coach University, a "Virtual organization, founded in 1988 by Thomas J. Leonard. The two year program consists of 36 modules of training and development. Until May of this year, the school has been run by 110 volunteers around North America. Corbin says with her new position at the school, not only will her own coaching skills develop, but she will be in a position to help others.

Corbin says that students who enroll are encouraged to find their own coaches to speed and improve the learning process. And who should think about becoming a coach? Corbin says anyone in whom a helping, guiding attitude is inherent. The skills of

communication and distinctions are taught to the would-be coach.

Business improvement is the key reason why business owners need coaches. In fact, Corbin describes a coach as being like a business partner...but one who doesn't get any of the profits. According to Corbin, coaches act as a sounding board. In that role, they offer advice, help define goals, increase profitability, and develop better communication skills.

"This is action-based work. I do this with individuals who are already okay, they just need some guidance in how to get to that bigger, better goals in life."

The best part about coaching for most business owners is that it is usually done by phone, and sometimes by email, although it can be done in-person, and in group settings. Most coaches will spend four, half-hour phone calls with their

clients each month. The calls are structured to start with a review of what was accomplished that week, followed by an outline of problems encountered, and a discussion of what solutions might be.

The last part of the call is spent on goals, and what can be done in the short term, and long term. However, Corbin says sometimes, the client will become so excited about something discussed in the call, that they don't spend the full half hour with the coach, preferring to get back to work right away.

"That's a good sign," says Corbin, "that as a coach, I'm helping my client deal with the best of his or her ideas, and making them work."

And what kind of business owner should consider finding a coach? Corbin says it's anyone who wants to know themselves better. "if you know who you are, rather than who you think you should be, than you can get to where you want to go."

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