

choice

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Coach or Consultant?



Finding common ground and opportunities between two different yet complementary professions

Blending Coaching & Consulting

The Value of the Trusted Advisor

Coach As Consultant

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Coach As Consultant

Is your coaching really consulting? Maybe if it was, you'd be making a six-figure income!

Check your contracts, coaches!

Does your contract include language referencing the descriptors of a coach as “guide” or “trusted advisor,” or is the term “consultant” anywhere in your document? If so, you could be open to an ethics violation from the International Coach Federation (ICF).

In an ethics ruling against a seasoned MCC within the last five years, the Independent Review Board of the ICF's Ethics Committee ruled a coaching agreement to be “unclear with reference to the nature of coaching” when the coach in question had the following language in her contract: “Coach agrees to serve as guide, advisor, and consultant in the areas identified by the client.” The ICF ruled that such language in the coaching agreement, regardless of the fact that it was referencing services performed in an organizational context, “is not in alignment with the ICF definition of coaching or the ICF Core Coaching Competencies.”

“Consulting, in the big leagues anyway, is about excellence.”

Bravo to the ICF for putting a stake in the ground around the differentiation between coaching and consulting.

Beware to the coaches who want to make a living!

Is Coaching Part of Consulting?

When talking to executives and leaders, I often describe my work as “directive coaching” based on my philosophy that the corporations in which I coach leaders and teams don't actually pay big bucks for me to come in only asking questions. The ICF and several coach training schools will have you think that pure coaching is when the coach only asks questions, and



that anything other than asking questions constitutes consulting. This could be the biggest disservice perpetrated against new and under-utilized coaches by the industry into which they are attempting to grow their coaching businesses. If a coach is interested in breaking into or expanding his or her business into executive or leadership coaching, it will help tremendously in the sales process to hold coaching in the broader context of consulting.

In my 17 years in the business, I've seen a lot of efforts to distinguish between coaching and consulting. There was an article early on in a 2004 issue of the *International Journal of Coaching in Organizations* (Volume 2, Number 3, p.8: “The Ethics of Coaching”) where authors Bergquist and Grenier did a wonderful job of comparing the three Cs of coaching, consulting and counseling. I understand the dangers of co-mingling coaching and counseling, and there have been some legal cases in the U.S. accusing coaches of practicing therapy without a license. I get that; psychology is a highly regulated profession requiring serious training and coaches who tread on counseling space risk causing real harm to people with needs best addressed by therapy or medication. But why the big push to separate coaching from consulting?

Buyers & Business Development

Not intending to be controversial, I define coaching as part of the larger umbrella of consulting, particularly when it is performed in an organizational context. As a coach whose subject matter domain is leadership and business development, I work primarily in organizations with leaders and teams. In that context, the buyers are familiar with consultants and the value of the results they produce for the company.

When selling coaching services into organizations, the coach will be viewed by the buyer as a consultant. If it doesn't matter to our buyers that there be a distinction between coaches and consultants, why do we care? Decision-makers in companies are comfortable with buying consulting. There's a precedent for buying consulting, and often when they buy coaching, the expense appears in their internal systems as consulting. It's how they think of us anyway, so why do we need to assert our "non-consultant-ness"?

On the other side of the equation, I am not advocating for coaches to become true consultants and advice-givers. That opens up the whole conversation about liability insurance. Consultants (especially those involved in finance, construction, legal matters, etc.) need liability insurance because their advice could cause their clients to experience financial losses, damage, etc. Consultants carry expensive Errors and Omissions insurance for that very reason. As coaches, we do not give advice; however, if we begin to

think of ourselves under the larger umbrella of consulting, we may need to consider the same sort of protection for our businesses, especially if we engage in both coaching and consulting solutions for our clients.

I'd argue that it is a benefit to those of us who coach in businesses to be lumped together with the broader consulting world, for the



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sake of credibility. Consultants get results in an organizational context. They are smart problem solvers with subject matter expertise. Think McKinsey. Think Accenture. Think Deloitte. Consulting, in the big leagues anyway, is about excellence. The branding is powerful. The dollars are enormous. We, as

coaches, could use that to our advantage in the sales process.

Marketing Yourself As Consultant

Many coaches are not comfortable being a consultant. Consultants are accountable to bring answers. Coaches bring questions. Consultants have to *know* and be subject matter experts. Coaches uncover more when they come from not knowing; from genuine curiosity and wondering.

Consultants bring, for comparison's sake, benchmarks of the solutions of other companies and leaders with similar problems. Coaches hold up a metaphorical mirror so that the companies and leaders can learn from their own successes and experiences. Consultants hunt for problems to solve. Coaches seek strengths to build on. We can keep going with the differences.

But think about your business development efforts for a minute. Are you not a subject matter expert on the subject of coaching? Are you not seeking the problem or challenge your prospective buyer is facing to determine if coaching is an appropriate intervention? Are you not bringing “benchmarks” of results your coaching has created for others facing similar situations as your prospective buyer? Doesn't that make you a consultant in the process of getting someone to buy your coaching services?

If you're not comfortable being a consultant in your coaching business, try it in your sales process. It will make all the difference in your revenue results. •