



Mentor, Consultant or Coach?

*Margaret Miller**

Many organizers use the terms mentor, consultant or coach in their practice without truly understanding the difference and the impact of each one on their clients.

A mentor is a person who knows more than the person they are mentoring. The mentor takes the role of a teacher. They help him or her excel and often the person discovers other areas of talent they possess. Mentors are generally not compensated for their role.

A consultant is an expert in a particular area. Consultants assess the current situation and then advise on the appropriate path to take. For the most part, Professional Organizers are consultants. Organizers assess situations, recommend the appropriate solutions and then implement solutions, sometimes with their client's help and sometimes without.

A coach is an expert of his or her own life. A coach helps clients tap into their expertise and creativity. The relationship is co-designed by the client and coach and is often different for each coaching relationship. Coaching depends much more on the coach's use of interpersonal skills rather than on principles of reinforcement. The focus is tapping into the client's ideas and then assisting them to rely upon their skills, insights, and ideas rather than giving them the answers, solutions and direction, as in the role of a consultant.

A coach creates a safe environment by treating the client as an equal (as opposed to being a one-up position in the role of a consultant or mentor). A coach recognizes the uniqueness and giftedness of their client. A coach asks powerful questions, holds to a system of accountability and gives genuine feedback.

The role of a coach is confused with that of a mentor or consultant when there is a belief that a coach needs to be an expert in his or her field. The exact opposite holds true since coaches are generalists drawing from their vast experience to motivate, facilitate and guide the client whose issues and situations often may vary.

In coaching, the client is the expert and the coach is skilled in the process of bringing out the knowledge and giftedness of the client.

If you are using coaching in your business it is important to understand the fine line that coaching borders on – counseling or therapy. Cross the line and you may do damage to your client. The best way to understand the difference is to invest in coach's training. It is a long and expensive process but if you're serious about calling yourself a coach it is essential for your reputation. As the benefit of coaching becomes more known, clients will start asking about your training or credentials as a coach.

I'd like to share some excerpts from an article that appeared in the ***NAPO Newsletter***, Volume 16, Number 6 written by Kathy Paawu and Dorothy Streich. They are Professional Organizers and certified coaches.

By Kathy Paawu: "I started by business as a Professional Organizer in 1995, and nine months later I attended my first NAPO conference. One of the workshops I attended at the conference was about coaching, and it was one of those pivotal moments in my business and in my life. I had never heard of coaching before but I left that workshop very excited about the possibilities and with an intent to incorporate coaching into my consulting practice. Several months later I had my first coaching client. About a year after that I decided that perhaps I should look into some coach training. I was feeling very inadequate and uneasy about offering these new coaching services. My gut told me that something was not right. After taking my first coaching workshop I discovered that what I had been offering was not coaching at all – it was consulting and I was calling it coaching.

So what's the difference between consulting and coaching? The simplest answer I can give is this: as a consultant, I am hired to offer my expert advice to assist my client in creating a more organized and effective environment and to manage their time more efficiently. As a coach, I am hired to assist my clients in accessing their own wisdom and their own good ideas. In other words, as a coach I do not give advice; I serve as a clarifier, reflector, cheerleader, truth-teller, accountability partner and champion for my client's success.

The defining difference is that as a consultant I am the expert, and I come to the table with recommendations and advice. As a coach, my client is the expert; I have the questions and my client has the answers"

By Dorothy Streich: "I started my organizing business in 1992. During my first organizing appointment I recognized that the client needed much more than systems. Frequently clients did not know their goals, vision or purposes, so there was no foundation. They had a mental block. As an organizer, the challenge of sufficient motivation and the ability to sustain motivation were areas that left me frustrated. I took coach's training as I knew this was the tool that would make a significant positive difference in my ability to help my clients succeed."

Coaching is not consulting – Kathy explained that difference. Coaching is not therapy, although it can be therapeutic. It doesn't examine life history to figure out the why of behaviour; it doesn't look back. It looks at now and forward. It is about choice and

action. Coaching helps the client gain insight and clarity in order to create a new way of being and doing. Coaching includes listening, curiosity, and questioning from the perspective of not knowing. It is frustrating and challenging to organize a resistant or blocked client and return to find everything in disarray. Coaching breaks through the resistance and blocks so that client taps into the answers inside them – the right answer for them. Early in my practice I was often surprised at my client's answers. Sometimes they bore no resemblance to my answer. Now I listen, question and clarify because I know I don't have the right answers for my clients – they do.

Coaches ask hard questions. Hard questions are not scripted but come from listening for the unspoken. The client becomes aware of their thoughts, beliefs and actions. Hard questions required introspection, not Quick replies.”

If you are interested in becoming a coach or want to know more about the profession and training available, visit the International Coach Federation website at

www.coachfederation.org

*Margaret Miller is founder of TERAGRAM Coaching and Consulting Group. She currently holds two accreditations. She is a Certified Executive Coach with the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches and a Certified RESULTS Coach with The Coaching Group. She also holds two training accreditations with Langevin Learning Services.

Miller's professional memberships include a 3-year term with the International Coach Federation, Toronto chapter board, a current member of the ethics committee with Worldwide Association of Business Coaches, a current director with the Board of Certification for Professional Organizers, the former president and a founding member with Professional Organizers in Canada, and a 3-year term on the board of her local Chamber of Commerce. Margaret currently sits on the board of Adler International Learning Inc.

Margaret is the recipient of POC's Harold Taylor Award and Adler's Presidents Award recognizing her excellence, professionalism and outstanding contribution to both organizations. The 2007 ICF Toronto Chapter PRISM Award was won by Sysco Canada and the PC team of coaches. As one of the PC Team associate coaches, TERAGRAM's founder and CEO, Margaret Miller, was acknowledged for her excellence in her leadership coaching work with Sysco Canada.