

# Developing a Life Coaching Practice

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When I started my coaching career, people would often ask, “What sport do you coach?” This is not surprising, given the history of the word *coach* and its tie to athletics. Now, when I say “life coach,” people still look at me curiously, but I no longer need to discuss “what sport.” Our profession is receiving more and more public awareness and attention.

*Coaching* and *mentoring* have been common terms in the corporate environment for decades. Executive coaching has always been accepted as a perk or desirable form of consultation and support for high-level management. A new distinction today, however, is mentoring, which is a service provided formally or informally in order to train those employees who might be moving up the corporate ladder internally and who are mentored on the manager’s ways. Corporate coaching today is provided both internally (by coaches who work for the company) and externally (by coaches hired by either the company or the managers themselves). Life coaching has now become desirable and accessible to those outside the corporate environment, and many corporate and business leaders understand that, ultimately, it is *all* life coaching.

However, many people in the helping fields are still unaware of what coaching is and how to become a coach. As a way into looking at how one might develop a life coaching practice, it might be useful to first take a look at the history of coaching as a development out of traditional psychology. Psychology and coaching share a similar history, and each can learn much from the other.

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ROOTS OF LIFE COACHING

Psychological theorists in the early part of the 20th century set the framework for life coaching’s “whole and healthy person” view. The shift from seeing clients as ill or pathological toward viewing them as “well and whole” and seeking a richer life is paramount to understanding the evolution of life coaching. Life coaches view clients as whole and brilliant people and focus not on pathology, but on wellness.

Most people would agree that Sigmund Freud (1856/1965, 1982) had a dramatic influence on society’s view of mental illness and stimulated a deeper understanding of behavior. Although much of Freud’s theory has little applicability to life coaching, he did profess that driving influences in people’s lives were not conscious (ego-driven) but unconscious forces –

the id (libido) and the superego (social conscience), which he believed provided rich opportunities for analysis and dream interpretation. It is this emphasis on symbolic thinking that is relevant to and beneficial for life coaching. Life coaches help clients discover their brilliance, which often lies masked or buried in their unconscious mind and can be accessed when they begin to design their lives consciously and purposely.

A few colleagues from Freud's inner circle, including Carl Jung and Alfred Adler, broke away from his theories of neurosis and psychosis, positing theories that were more teleological and optimistic about human potential. Although there remains a significant distinction between therapy approaches and coaching, many of Adler's and Jung's theories are antecedents of modern-day life coaching.

Adler (1927/1998; H. L. Ansbacher & R. R. Ansbacher, 1956), for example, saw himself as more of a personal educator, believing that every person develops a unique life approach that shapes his or her goals, values, habits, and personal drives. He believed that happiness arises from a sense of significance and social connectedness (belonging), not merely from individual objectives and desires. Adler saw each person as the creator and artist of his or her life and frequently involved his clients in goal setting, life planning, and inventing their future – all tenets and approaches in life coaching today.

Similarly, Carl Jung (1933, 1970, 1976; Read, Fordham, & Adler, 1953) believed in the power of connectedness and relationships, as well as a “future orientation” or teleological belief that we create our future through visioning and purposeful living. Many of Jung's writings focused on life after the age of 40. This focus is particularly appropriate for life coaches, because we work primarily with adult learners. Jung often coached adults through a “life review” and encouraged his clients to consciously live their lives by expressing their natural gifts and talents, moving toward greater fulfillment by living life “on purpose.”

Jung's theories and approaches also emphasized spirituality and the values expressed as one goes through the process he called individuation – the progression and development of the spiritual self. This is particularly prevalent in the second half of life, a time when life coaches are most likely to experience individuation themselves and support their clients to do the same. Jung also described the importance of myths and rituals, which are increasingly becoming important components of our life coaching clients' lives. I believe therapist-trained coaches are particularly qualified to assist clients in these important stages of adult development.

## **INFLUENCES OF HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY AND THE HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT**

During this time period, counseling and psychotherapy were starting to be viewed by many as arts more than sciences. The influence of the theories of Maslow (1954/1970, 1962, 1971/1993) and the emergence of humanistic, client-centered approaches (Bugental, 1967; Fadiman & Frager, 1976; Frankl, 1959; Rogers, 1951; among others) saw the client as full of potential and possibility rather than as stricken with neuroses or pathology.

In 1951, Carl Rogers' book *Client-Centered Therapy* defined counseling and therapy as relationships in which the client was assumed to have the ability to change and grow in the context of the clinician-created therapeutic alliance. This alliance evolved from a safe, confidential space granting the client or patient what Rogers called “unconditional positive regard.” I believe this shift in perspective was a significant precursor to the development of life coaching.

In the years after World War II, American psychologists began to be influenced by European schools of thought, namely phenomenology and existentialism. These theoretical views laid much of the philosophical foundation for what was to become the Third Force in psycho-

logical thought – humanistic psychology. (The early work of Carl Rogers [1951], Kurt Lewin, Prescott Lecky, and, eventually, Abraham Maslow [1954/1970, 1962, 1971/1993] also served as important influences.) Emphasis then shifted to studying the whole person, not just fragmented parts.

Although the philosophies and values of humanistic psychology unified the whole field of psychology, it also polarized the profession. Humanistic psychology arose largely as a reaction against behaviorism's mechanistic view of humanity and was once again concerned with human experience and intrapsychic motivations, as it had been in psychology's earliest years, but these concerns were viewed as nonobservable, nonmeasurable, intervening variables, according to behavioral psychology's precepts.

Abraham Maslow, considered by many to be the father of humanistic psychology, was largely responsible for injecting much-needed credibility and energy into the human potential movement of the 1960s with the publication of his seminal treatise *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1962). In this work, Maslow summarized his research of "self-actualizing people" (a term first coined by Kurt Goldstein) and coined terms such as "full-humanness," "being," and "becoming." This book is largely a continuation of theories he first posited in *Motivation and Personality* (1954/1970). Maslow studied the "healthy personality" of people whom he termed self-actualizers; he researched, questioned, and observed people who were living with a sense of vitality and purpose, and who were constantly seeking to grow psychologically and achieve more of their human potential. It is this key point in history that I believe set the framework for the field of life coaching to emerge in the 1990s. People seeking personal evolution and ways to live more fully do not need psychological counseling; life coaching is a more accurate paradigm for the enhanced outcomes or achievements these clients seek.

Maslow was instrumental in granting value and importance to the idea of personal growth and asserting its necessity for the healthy personality. However, Maslow was not the first to hold these ideas. Many early psychiatrists and psychologists revolted against the orthodox approaches to mental problems and their emphasis on a person's pathological or pathogenic components. The reader has already been introduced to the influential work of Adler and Jung, but Gordon Allport (1937, 1955, 1961), James Bugental (1967), Kurt Goldstein, Karen Horney (1980), Sidney Jourard (1974), Prescott Lecky, Rollo May (1953, 1975, 1979), Carl Rogers (1951), and Fritz Perls also influenced psychology's move toward a wellness perspective that laid much of the groundwork for modern coaching theory, perspective, and techniques.

Third Force Psychology has found its place in mainstream psychology and is represented by an international organization. The first issue of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* was published in 1961 and edited by Anthony Sutich. The Association of Humanistic Psychology (AHP) began the following year. Abraham Maslow's ideas were central to the beginnings of both the journal and the association, but the AHP was not organized simply to promote his philosophy. The AHP represents a broad viewpoint, but it emerged as the third major force in psychology (following Freudianism and behaviorism) because of its unitary revolt against mechanistic, deterministic psychology. I believe this philosophical shift took root in a generation that now rejects the idea of sickness and instead seeks wellness, wholeness, and purposeful living. Hence the emergence of life coaching!

## **INFLUENCES OF MILTON ERICKSON AND SOLUTION-FOCUSED APPROACHES**

The work of Milton Erickson (the father of American hypnosis) is a key precursor to the methods used in coaching today. Erickson, an iconoclastic and unique psychiatrist, believed in the inherent ability of individuals to achieve wellness if the reason for an illness could be

thwarted (O'Hanlon & Hexum, 1991). Erickson often achieved seemingly “miraculous results” from just a few sessions with a patient. Jay Haley (1986) coined the term “uncommon therapy” to describe Erickson’s approach.

Bandler and Grindler (1975), who were students of Erickson, then developed an approach called neurolinguistic programming (NLP), which represents an evolution of much of Ericksonian theory and technique. This approach focuses on outcome for the client and on the powerful use of language and question-asking by the therapist to facilitate transformational change. Linguistics and inquiry are key aspects of the work of a life coach, and much of the heritage of these fundamental coaching facets lies in the early work of Ericksonian practitioners.

More recent psychological approaches that have evolved from Ericksonian and other wellness approaches are the solution-focused therapies. These approaches, which are not insight or depth psychology dependent, are additional powerful influences on modern coaching theory and practices. In addition, Glasser’s reality therapy, Ellis’s rational emotive therapy, systemic family therapies (Haley, 1986; Madanes, 1981; Satir, 1964, 1976), psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1965), and many hybrids of these lend themselves to coaching strategies. In all of these approaches, the main focus is not pathology but rather behavioral change through increased awareness and choices to allow for desired future results and solutions to current “problems in living.” For example, the work of Bill O’Hanlon (1999; O’Hanlon & Beadle, 1999; O’Hanlon & Hexum, 1991; O’Hanlon & Martin, 1992) emphasizes possibilities and preferencing – an approach that fits well in life coaching relationships. The modern approaches of Steve de Shazer (1985, 1988) and his colleagues, called solution-focused counseling, could just as easily be called coaching. In fact, many of their techniques and approaches for use with difficult clients have been adapted into coaching techniques, such as the miracle question and asking powerful questions that lead to action-oriented steps. And more recently, the growth of Positive Psychology led by Martin Seligman (2002) and colleagues has added much to the credibility of life coaching as applied positive psychology.

Life coaching has, in essence, developed from three streams:

1. helping professions such as psychotherapy and counseling, and related theoretical perspectives as noted above,
2. consulting and organizational development and industrial psychology, and
3. personal development trainings such as Erhard Seminars Training (EST), Lifespring Landmark Forum, and the work of self-help writer and professional speaker Anthony Robbins.

The personal development courses listed above all focus on taking personal action and responsibility for one’s life choices. They often include one-to-one coaching as part of their service or recommend it to those who desire sustainable results from the weekend training experience.

Having taken a quick tour of the psychological origins of life coaching, let us now move forward with an examination of what it takes to become a life coach.

## **BECOMING A LIFE COACH**

I believe that therapists are eminently qualified to be life coaches, although I am also clear that many therapists enjoy what they do and have no desire to change their focus. That said, you are well-educated and well-trained, you possess the necessary critical helping skills, and you have many other skills and talents. All of these are essential ingredients for successful life coaches. If I asked you to write out your qualifications, you could draw up a long list. Other

than additional training specific to life coaching, you are ready to start today. What might be keeping you from taking the next step?

During my experience coaching and training hundreds of therapists during the past several years, I have discovered what I believe to be the most important ingredient for a successful transition from therapist to life coach. It isn't where you went to college or how you were trained as a therapist. It isn't how successful your therapy practice has been or even how many years you have been a helping professional. The most important indicator of success in transitioning from therapist to life coach is your ability to make a change.

I have seen relatively new therapists transition smoothly into a full-time life coaching practice in a short time, while other experienced professionals struggle to infuse coaching into their practices on even a part-time basis. This journey will require you to think and act differently as a helping professional. I understand it is frightening to let go of the way you have always worked and try something new. This is plain old fear, a common emotion for individuals facing any transition. Whether you are planning to close your therapy practice completely and jump headfirst into life coaching or whether you want to stick your toes in first and try it on a part-time basis, a degree of discomfort is often associated.

As we tell our therapy clients, these fears are likely based on our negative beliefs about the world or about ourselves. If you hold on to these fears, you won't be able to take the risks, seize the opportunities, and develop the positive perspective necessary to function successfully as a life coach. Many therapists share a fear of marketing themselves as a life coach – of managing their coaching practice as a business. You may share this fear, or other fears might occur to you as you read. You can recognize them as the little voice in the back of your head trying to persuade you to put this contribution down and go back to doing what you already know how to do – therapy.

## **Reclaiming Your Soul: The Joyfulness of Life Coaching**

Many therapists and counselors, especially those in private practice, have seen a monumental shift in the profession in the last several decades. Counseling and psychotherapy were, in my opinion, never meant to be part of the medical model, but were seen by many as an art in relating and helping people overcome psychological obstacles in their lives. But somewhere along the line, the therapy profession was included in third-party payment of services by insurance companies. This allowed health insurance to cover psychotherapy if a medical (psychiatric) diagnosis was given to the patient. Most therapists did not even use the term *patient* but instead opted for *client*, lending more credence to the professional view of therapy as being a nonmedical service.

The more we as a profession co-opted to be part of the medical/psychiatric community, the more entangled we became in the managed care system that began infiltrating the profession in the 1980s and became extremely intrusive in the 1990s. Almost every practitioner has seen his or her income drastically reduced and paperwork time increased.

This shift to managed care has caused great chaos, consternation, and burnout among private practitioners, to the point where approximately 10% leave the profession each year and another 10% wish they could! In fact, *Psychotherapy Finances*, in its annual survey of practitioners, states that 23% are taking steps to leave their practice (Williams, 2000). Nineteen percent now list coaching as a service they offer. One might say that coaching was a professional service waiting to happen, and managed care helped it along!

When training therapists about adding coaching to their repertoire, I have both observed and experienced the powerful impact this career transition (whether part-time or full-time) has had. Once clinicians hear about the possibility of working with high-functioning, highly motivated clients who will pay to have a coach, they become filled with excitement and get a joyful expression on their face. After all, most of us never wanted to work with severely depressed or

conflicted persons 100% of the time. Didn't you often hope that potential clients would call you because they simply wanted to improve their life? Adding coaching as a new skill set allows you to choose more carefully the clients you see for therapy and attract new clients who are candidates for coaching.

As I describe the coaching relationship and the joyfulness of being someone's personal coach, let me first acknowledge that this joyfulness can also be part of the therapeutic relationship. I have provided counseling or psychotherapy for years, and I know that great joy and gratitude can be gained from assisting a client to overcome severe trauma or emotional struggles. I became a therapist to have a significant positive impact on people's lives and relationships. However, three undeniable factors seem to be at work in the profession of psychotherapy that can lead to a less-than-joyful experience for the therapist.

1. *Length of time in the profession.* Psychotherapy with emotionally fragile people can be draining over the long haul. Therapists give so much of themselves that professional burnout results if they do not self-nurture regularly.
2. *The degree of seriousness of clients' issues.* Therapists who often treat clients with serious and complicated diagnoses are at greater risk of burnout due to the psychic and emotional energy required to deal with such difficult and often irresolvable situations.
3. *Managed care.* Therapists who are trapped in the managed care system have fewer "approved" sessions with their clients and a lesser amount of reimbursement, as well as a reduction in income, more hours of paperwork, and increased liability. This scenario has led to a large percentage of therapists in private practice looking for ways to make a living in cash-only practices and needing to add other income streams to their business. Life coaching is a natural transition that can be added, along with training, speaking, and consulting.

## **What Makes the Coaching Relationship So Full of Joyful Energy?**

Isn't it logical that supporting someone to experience a better life – a more fulfilling and empowered existence – should foster the experience of joy for both the coach and the client? This is a unique quality of the coaching relationship; the energy exchange seems to be less draining on a coach than it often is on a therapist. In fact, if the coaching relationship is draining to you as the coach, you are either working too hard on the client's behalf or the client is not coachable and may instead need therapy.

Many of my colleagues, as well as graduates of my training program who have shifted from therapist to coach, report several factors that have led to a more joyful work experience.

1. *The work schedule.* Coaches can include a mix of face-to-face coaching and phone coaching, and those who do phone coaching can work from home or wherever they happen to be. There are no parking concerns and no need to dress up. Coaches with international clients can even adjust their work hours to accommodate time-zone differences, thereby increasing their market base to global potential. One former therapist says,

I no longer try to fit into somebody else's system or rules about how something needs to be done. I feel good about that because I can control what I do, and it fits who I am. I can control my schedule so that it fits my personal life, and the balance between work, play, and family is wonderful.

This statement reflects what I have heard from other coaches. You can still be part of your local community and meet people face to face, but your playing field expands to the whole world when you work by phone and e-mail. You still feel very connected with your clients and they with you.

2. *The ability to live and work wherever you desire.* Coaches who work by telephone with occasional in-person sessions can live in desirable places where building a therapy practice would have been difficult (unless one does therapy primarily by phone, which I have serious objections to and which leads to liability concerns as well). I know coaches who live in remote communities, on boats, and even in RVs for periods of time. Telecoaching is not geographically constrained. Some coaches have even exchanged homes with another coach for a month, and their only professional adjustment was to give their clients a different phone number for that period. Our joy of coaching comes in part from the opportunity to live, work, and play anywhere while maintaining a professional presence, as well as an above-average income.
3. *The egalitarian aspect of the coaching relationship.* Psychotherapy and counseling require, or at least assume, a hierarchical aspect to the relationship. Therapy takes on a “doctor-patient” or “expert-client” context and requires strict boundaries and ethics in the relationship outside of the office. In the coaching relationship, the concerns of transference and countertransference are not part of the equation. Although our professional training as therapists certainly makes us sensitive to that construct, we are much freer to be authentic with our clients.
4. *The financial rewards.* Although I realize that money is not the driving factor in all careers, I also believe that as therapists we have been undervalued and underpaid relative to our expertise, training, and effort. So the fact that life coaching can command a higher hourly fee or monthly retainer than therapy and requires no third-party billing is very inviting. To me, remuneration that is appropriate to the value received for the client is very freeing and more in line with other professions, such as accounting, legal services, strategic planning, and public relations. Professions that provide great value and results should command respectable fees.

I believe that in recent times, professional therapists on average have been making less money and working longer hours. For therapists dependent on third-party payments and managed care rules, hourly fees have dropped and paperwork has increased. Even those who are in a private practice may have trouble commanding fees higher than \$100 per hour. Of course, exceptions occur in large metropolitan cities, but this is an average fee. Although some coaching clients may not have the resources to pay more than that, most coaches command fees from \$100 to \$300 per hour – sometimes more for corporate or executive coaching. In general, coaching is for people who are already successful and who view coaching as a valuable service to assist them in achieving more, making significant changes, and living the life of their dreams.

## **Total Life Design**

If you intend to be a credible coach, live your life as you coach others to live theirs. This does not mean your life must be perfect. Living purposefully means living in full awareness of what can be improved in your life and what you want to maintain or eliminate. This is why I believe it is essential that you also have a personal coach, especially during the beginning of your transition. Even later, when you are successful, having your own coach keeps you focused on your priorities, as well as aware of how your clients may experience the process of coaching. I have had coaches throughout my transitions and have also hired specialists from time to time.

Much of our approach is presented as Total Life Coaching™ (Williams & Thomas, 2005). I coach from a client-centered, whole-person approach, with the knowledge and experience that coaching for improvement in one area of a client's life will undoubtedly affect many other areas since they are all connected.

Here is my own definition of life coaching:

Life coaching is a powerful human relationship where trained coaches assist people to design their future rather than get over their past. Through a typically long-term relationship, coaches aid clients in creating visions and goals for ALL aspects of their lives and creating multiple strategies to support achieving those goals. Coaches recognize the brilliance of each client and their personal power to discover their own solutions when provided with support, accountability, and unconditional positive regard.

Truly effective coaching unleashes the client's individual spirit and deep desires, expands his or her capacity to achieve real change, and can even catalyze personal transformation. This does not occur with simple techniques like goal setting and motivation. It occurs when coaching considers the underlying context for change and facilitates the client's experience of living more on purpose. If you are going to be an effective coach, in a whole-person context, I believe it is essential for you to have done the work yourself. Most coach training programs teach a variety of techniques and strategies for coaching, but many utilize external skills. To be a truly masterful coach, you also must work on changing from within, because the profession of coaching is more about your *beingness* than about skills or techniques.

Many of us have experienced psychotherapy as clients, perhaps as an educational requirement or because we had our own healing work to do. Similarly, I believe masterful coaches must experience coaching on a regular basis and work with a coach on the very issues or desires that will also benefit your clients. For me, that starts with looking at one's life purpose, or life design.

Clients will indeed come to coaching for more mundane reasons than designing their life, but whatever the presenting objective, there is always the possibility of introducing the concept of Total Life Coaching™. For that process, you as the coach must have experienced the power of designing your life and living more on purpose.

Some coaching schools call this concept "coaching from the inside out." I consider it part of a coach's total life design, but whatever you call it, I believe it will help you discover ways to coach your clients about life design and personal fulfillment. In the process, this concept will be useful and perhaps even transformational for you as well. Being able to "walk the talk" as a coach means that you have experienced what you suggest for your clients and that you implement the skills so that your life is a model for your clients. Again, this does not mean that you are living the life of a saint or that you are an enlightened master; it means that you live your life purposefully and are aware of when you get in your own way. You must be committed to modeling how it is to be living a fulfilling life or be on the path to creating a fulfilling life. You generally will attract clients who are one step behind or one step ahead of where you are. Remember, sometimes the student is also the teacher.

With this brief introduction to the origins, benefits, and personal requirements of transitioning into a life coaching practice, we now turn to the hard part for many of us: learning how to build a coaching business. As challenging as it can be at times, we are running businesses and we must be able to look at our practices from that point of view.

## DEVELOPING AND MARKETING YOUR LIFE COACHING PRACTICE

As therapists, we were never taught much about building our business. In fact, we do not even call it a business – we call it a practice! Further, most of us were taught that it was even unethical and unprofessional to market or advertise our services. It was not until the late 1980s that we started to run Yellow Pages ads with descriptions of our services, and we certainly never mentioned in conversations at cocktail parties that we could help someone with his or her problem.

As a coach, you are a businessperson providing a unique form of assistance. You can speak about it, advertise it, and enthusiastically let people know you might be able to help them reach their goals. You can even meet in public to discuss how your services might be of use.

Obviously, a crucial component for your transition to life coaching is learning entrepreneurial skills and the simple, powerful development and marketing steps for a successful business. It's only natural for most helping professionals to be uncomfortable with the idea of marketing or selling. The following simple strategies can provide you with new ways to approach marketing as a way of letting people know what you do.

### Marketing Versus Selling

Most of us frequently confuse marketing with selling. We probably hear ourselves saying things like:

*“I don't like selling.”*

*“I can't take rejection.”*

*“Selling is unprofessional.”*

*“I don't want to appear pushy.”*

*“I became a therapist, not a salesperson.”*

I understand these fears. They come from your inner gremlin – your self-critic. But you have many options for marketing your business, and it can even be enjoyable and natural. Think of it this way. If you are right-handed and lost the use of your right hand, eventually you would become proficient and comfortable using your left hand. It just takes practice and a willingness to change. And this is a wonderful new opportunity for learning, as well as for repackaging your current skills.

I also believe that the marketing methods you use should be enjoyable (although they may take some practice for you to achieve a good comfort level). Remember that you are not knocking on doors or telemarketing to sell a product that people do not want. Most people will want coaching. The goal is to attract the type of client you want to work with and for whom your services are both valuable and affordable. Isn't that true for the professional services *you* utilize?

### Stop Being a Secret!

My basic philosophy is that if you want people to hire you as a coach, you must stop being a secret. The principle of attracting clients is more powerful than the manipulative promotion and selling other sales professionals use, but if you are going to follow the principle of attraction, remember that the word *action* comprises more than half of the word. You will not get clients by just wishing and hoping they will contact you. They need to know you exist, what it

is you do, and the benefits they (or those they might refer) might receive by working with you as a coach.

As I have trained professionals to become coaches, I have heard many people talk about their beliefs, myths, and misconceptions about marketing. My training approach is based on five key principles.

1. *Marketing is not selling.* I wish I had thought of it first, but as Peter Drucker, the business and management consultant, said so eloquently: “The purpose of marketing is to make selling unnecessary” (p. 71; Drucker, 2001). I definitely agree. Of course, technically, you are selling. You are selling yourself and your service, but it should be done in a way that does not feel or look like stereotypical high-pressure selling. There is nothing inherently wrong with selling. We all sell and we all buy. Many of us, though, are uncomfortable with types of selling that pressure people into buying something they didn’t want. Marketing your coaching services is simply opening a relationship and offering the possibility of coaching being something that could greatly benefit the potential client. It is not meant to be manipulative, seductive, or dishonest. You will need to learn to market yourself until your business grows to the point of being filled mostly by referrals – the ideal position for a self-sustaining business.
2. *Therapists have the necessary marketing skills because we are trained to listen well and communicate clearly, and also because we are good at creating relationships.* This is why marketing gurus of today, especially in service-oriented businesses, say that networking is the key to business success. What is networking? It is developing relationships with people so they know what you do and you know what they do. Networking is the way business is built through cross-referrals or as a way of serving your clients. Coaches who become master networkers and who can refer their clients to other professionals or services that might assist specific concerns will have a thriving business and a reputation as someone who knows whom to call or where to go. C. J. Hayden (2006) says, “Marketing is telling people what you do . . . over and over” (p. 7). So, the keys to success as a new coach come from figuring out what you want to say about your coaching, how to say it, and to whom you want to say it. If you truly love what you do, people will experience your authenticity, and even if they don’t want to hire you as a coach, they may know someone who will. In coaching, you are hired more for who you are than for the specifics of what you do. If you are enjoying your life and you coach people so that they can, too, you are very attractive as a coach. People will want some of what you have. They will want you to help them achieve the level of happiness and clarity of vision that you have achieved. All you need to do is guide them to develop their life according to their desired agenda.
3. *Marketing your practice successfully and easily is more likely to occur when you clarify what you do, how you do it, with whom you work best, and so on.* Clarity allows you to focus your efforts, your resources, and your energies. It also allows you to craft a message about your coaching business that will attract clients to you (if you are not a secret). Clarity allows you to create a fulfilling practice, which may or may not be a full practice.
4. *Marketing your coaching business successfully can happen only when you have created the space, time, and energy for this new business paradigm to occur.* This is important. If you want to create a coaching business, you must turn intention into actions, give it energy and time, and be open to the changes in your life this will create.
5. *Be a resource.* As you get to know other coaches, professionals, books, and places where your clients can go for specific help or services, you become increasingly valuable. Keep a good database of international professionals, coaches, and schools. You can often find a helpful direction or resource for your client with a quick phone call or

e-mail. You become a great referral service as well as a great coach. It doesn't take much time or energy if you have the resources and contacts readily available.

## **First Steps to Marketing Your Practice**

In the early stages of developing your coaching business, you can start by getting business cards, creating client folders, and being ready for your first "customer." When you are ready to start coaching (and I hope you have had some formal training), you need to start trying on the metaphoric coach's uniform. Get accustomed to using the phrase *life coach*, *personal coach*, or *business coach*. The popularity of coaching makes marketing much easier than it used to be. I cannot stress enough, however, that although you may be able to add coaching to your business and learn much from this contribution and other sources, you are not likely to become a masterful life coach without formal coach-specific training, as well as consulting with your own personal coach.

## **Developing a Target Niche**

The current wisdom in marketing today, especially for a service-oriented business, is to develop one to three target niches. As a therapist or counselor, you may have some special expertise or skills that would lend themselves to a specific niche. For example, if you already do marriage or couples counseling, you might consider marketing yourself as a relationship coach. I know many relationship coaches who do couples coaching by phone and attract busy, dual-income couples who want to improve their relationship and often just need the space and time devoted to coaching for transformation to occur.

Another possible niche is family business coaching for a skilled systems-oriented therapist who is knowledgeable about the unique dynamics that arise in family-owned businesses. Associations and specific trainings are available for those who would like to specialize in coaching family businesses. Teen coaching, family coaching, coaching people with ADD, and so on are other obvious niches for skilled therapists.

I know a former career counselor who now has a full-time coaching business with career coaching as a specialty niche. All she really needed to change was the way she described her business. She still gives traditional assessments and job-search "coaching," but now she can do it internationally through faxes and e-mails. When clients complete their career-specific coaching, they often want to retain her as their life coach; the coaching then takes on a more whole-life perspective.

One way to develop a possible niche is to take a look at who comes into your office now. What kinds of clients are you best with? Whom do you enjoy working with the most? On the other hand, many therapists-turned-coaches develop new interests and may not want to do the same type of coaching as the therapy they did. It may also be confusing as to whether you are attracting coachable clients or clients who need therapeutic interventions. This can be one of the most challenging areas in your transition. Confer with your own coach or mentor about this.

## **Branding versus Niche Development**

I have had discussions with many of the trainees in my coach-training business, as well as with therapists I have mentored to become coaches, about the distinction between branding and niche development.

Branding is based on the concept of singularity. It creates in the mind of the prospect the perception that no product on the market is quite like your product. You are your product. The coaching service you provide is your coaching – your style, your personality, your energy, your insight, and your integrity. Branding as a coach implies that you consider your own unique

qualities and the unique qualities of the people you really want to coach, and you then give that combination a brand. For example, one coach I know wants to be known as the “life balance coach” and works with “busy professionals on the go who want to achieve balance in work, family, and fun.” That is an example of a branding more than a niche. Next, she might think of a niche market where she could find such busy professionals – for example, lawyers, therapists, entrepreneurs, and so on. Can you see how this could be her entrée into coaching? How do you want to be branded?

Ask three friends and three colleagues what they find unique about you and your relationship with them. What do they get from you that is special? You are as unique as a snowflake or a fingerprint. How does that impact whom you coach and how you coach? How might this lead to a *brand*?

## No Matter Where You Go, There You Are

Marketing can occur all the time because, as a therapist (and as a coach), it is you whom people hire, and the “you” that you present in public is part of the marketing. Another way to say this is that you are your message. This does not mean you are always selling, but it does mean that informal ways of meeting people or having conversations will eventually lead to the ubiquitous question, “What do you do?” How you answer that question or how you even elicit that question is the simplest, most efficient way to market your coaching business. I and many of my colleagues have actually found clients at the local tennis club, at an informal networking meeting, and on an airplane ride. The latter is actually more common than you think! How many times have you conversed with your seatmate on a plane and asked him or her, “What do you do?” If you ask it of your seatmate, he or she will ask it of you. One of the rules of good networking is to be interested in other people. People love to talk about themselves, and if you are genuinely interested in them – what their business is, what their hobbies are, and what dreams they have – they will most likely ask you what you do. Bingo! You might have a potential client.

Another marketing tip is often called the “elevator speech” or “magic moment.” It is a quick response for those inevitable times when someone asks, “What do you do?” I like to refer to it as your “laser intro.” A laser intro, as its name suggests, is done quickly and gets right to the point. The point is to let people know what you do so that they might ask more questions about how you do what you do. That leads to further conversation, either right then or at a future time, in which you have an opportunity to share details about how you work as a life coach and how you might be able to support the changes they seek.

The six key components of an effective laser intro or elevator speech include:

1. *Is it clear?* Your response to “What do you do?” must be clear, free of jargon, and easily understood.
2. *Is it concise?* A laser intro should be brief and delivered in 15 seconds or less.
3. *Is it compelling and captivating?* Your message must have a compelling quality – one that begs further inquiry and piques the listener’s interest.
4. *Is it conversational?* Your message should be delivered in an informal manner. This takes practice. You must be so natural and automatic with your message that it doesn’t sound like a rehearsed speech. A message delivered conversationally will encourage further conversation in your audience.
5. *Is it delivered with confidence?* The more practiced and natural you are and the more confident and passionate you are about what you do, the more attractive your message is to others. Remember that you are your message.
6. *Is the word “coach” in your message?* Somewhere in your message, you must say you are a coach (life coach, business coach, personal coach, relationship coach, parenting

coach, and so on). It is important for you to provide details about your style of coaching so that the listener can judge whether he or she might be interested in your services.

Having two or three laser intros is important so that you can adapt the basic message to your audience while still describing very quickly what you do. Here are a few tried-and-true laser intros I and other coaches have used successfully.

*Q:* What do you do?

*A:* I am a personal life coach. You know how people often have that gap between where they are and where they want to be? I work with them on filling the gap and creating the life they really want.

*Q:* What is it that you do?

*A:* Pretty much anything I want on any given day! And I teach others to do it, too! Does that sound like something that might interest you?

*Q:* What do you do?

*A:* I am a personal life coach. You know how a plumber comes in and snakes out your pipes to get the water flowing freely? What I do is work with people to unclog the personal and business blocks that keep their lives from flowing freely.

After the laser intro gets a person's attention, hopefully he or she will ask something like, "That sounds interesting. How do you do that?" Then the door is open to set a meeting over coffee or, better yet, to grant the person a free 30-minute coaching call so he or she can experience it firsthand. Even if you do not gain a client, the person will, at the very least, be familiar with your style and may become a great referral source for you!

In fact, your goal when you network with people or dialogue about your career is to be open to the possibility that the person may be genuinely interested in what you do and may want to know more. It is at this opportunity that I recommend being a living brochure – don't just talk about what coaching is, demonstrate it. Ask if you can coach the person on something he or she wants to change or a long-term goal. A spot coaching demonstration gives potential clients a taste of coaching, and they may then want the entire menu!

## TO LEARN MORE

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a personal or professional coach, please consider these books:

Williams, P., & Davis, D. (2007). *Therapist as Life Coach: An Introduction for Counselors and Other Helping Professionals* (Revised and Expanded Edition). New York: W. W. Norton.

Williams, P., & Menendez, D. (2007). *Becoming a Professional Life Coach: Lessons From the Institute for Life Coach Training*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Williams, P., & Thomas, L. (2005). *Total Life Coaching: 50+ Life Lessons, Skills, and Techniques to Enhance Your Practice and Your Life*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Williams, P., & Anderson, S. (Eds.). (2006). *The Law and Ethics of Coaching: How to Solve and Avoid Difficult Problems in Your Practice*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Drake, D., Brennan, D., & Gortz, K. (Eds.). (2008). *The Philosophy and Practice of Coaching: Insights and Issues for a New Era*. West Sussex, England: Jossey Bass.

Finally, you can contact The Institute for Life Coach Training (888-267-1206 or info@lifecoachtraining.com), which specializes in helping therapists make the transition to coaching.

## CONTRIBUTOR

**Patrick Williams, EdD, MCC**, is a license psychologist and one of the early pioneers of coaching. He began executive coaching in 1990, and in 1998 he founded the Institute for Life Coach Training, an International Coaching Federation (ICF) Accredited Coach Training Program. He speaks internationally on purposeful living, vital aging and new eldering, and the power of the coach approach in empowering and sustaining change. He is the coauthor of *Therapist as Life Coach: Transforming Your Practice; Total Life Coaching: 50+ Life Lessons, Skills, and Techniques to Enhance Your Practice and Your Life; The Law and Ethics of Coaching: How to Solve and Avoid Difficult Problems in Your Practice*; and *Becoming a Professional Life Coach: Lessons From the Institute for Life Coach Training*. In June 2006, Dr. Williams was awarded the honor of being named the first Global Visionary Fellow by the Foundation of Coaching for his project – Coaching the Global Village – bringing the coaching approach to the underserved through nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders in developing countries and nonprofit boards. Dr. Williams may be contacted at 17 Lakeside Drive, Palm Coast, FL 32137. E-mail: Pat@LifeCoachTraining.com

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