

Where can I find a coach that's right for me?

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The Question:

I am in my early twenties with a Bachelor of Commerce degree and a full-time job, but I am not happy with my current career path and am not sure of the steps I should be taking to get on the right track. I am interested in seeing a life/career coach for help in determining what type of career I should pursue and what type of further education will help me get there. Where can I find a good life/career coach or mentor that can help me, keeping in mind that I do not have a lot of money to spend?

The Answer:

First I want to acknowledge you for being willing to reflect on your career and ask the questions. As I've said to many others, our work-lives are marathons not sprints; we are in it for the long haul. It's always a good idea to check in and make sure you are on the right path.

When it comes to finding a good career coach to help with this exploration there is certainly ample choice, the key will be to find the right coach for you.

First, let's clarify a distinction between a mentor and coach (you mentioned both in your question). Both can be very valuable but they play different roles. A mentor is someone who shares a particular kind of experience you might value – perhaps in the area of work or industry you are interested in pursuing.

In contrast, a coach may or may not necessarily have the industry-specific experience but brings a specialized approach (yes, the coaching approach is distinct) that recognizes your expertise and elicits your most creative, resourceful self in the process. A coach will draw out your wisdom and help you discover and clarify your strengths and assets, values, priorities, interests, passions and options. These are essential to career planning and, equally important, your coach can support you in developing the right career action plan to help you reach your goals.

What to look for

Qualifications: Coaching is not a regulated profession so anyone can call themselves a coach but may or may not be appropriately trained and qualified. As a starting point, ask about their credentials, training and experience. There are thousands of coaches worldwide who have stepped up to become trained and certified, with many in Canada.

Specialization: These days there is a coach for everything, so make sure your coach has the specific interest and qualifications to provide career coaching and in any other area you may want (you also mentioned life coaching). A business coach specializing in helping entrepreneurs grow their business, for instance, may not be the right fit for you.

Relationship and fit: Coaching happens in a confidential, trusting exchange of conversation, so relationship and fit is key. Make sure you feel comfortable with the individual. Even if the coach has the right qualifications, they may not have the right style for you. Most coaches will offer a complimentary conversation to introduce themselves. The fit has to go two ways.

Mode: While face-to-face coaching can be an option if you hire a local coach, coaching is increasingly being offered through phone and Skype, which means you can engage a coach from afar if there's someone you want to work with. Often people assume it is better to work face-to-face, and then discover phone or Skype can be equally powerful and more convenient.

Resources to find a coach

The [International Coach Federation \(ICF\)](#) website is a great resource to identify the right [questions](#) to ask a prospective coach. They also have a free [coach referral service](#) that provides listings. Note the difference between an ICF member coach and an ICF-credentialed coach – the former may not yet be trained or certified.

Seek referrals from friends and peers who have worked with a coach. Find out about their experiences and talk to their coaches to see if they would fit with your needs.

Beyond one-on-one coaching you might also consider career group coaching and workshops. These can be valuable ways of learning, networking and at a more affordable price.

Consider test driving a career of interest. [Challenge Factory](#), a career coaching company, offers this unique service. This sounds like an interesting blend of mentoring and coaching and terrific for people who are curious about a career path but may want to test the waters before investing heavily in a new direction.

Finally, if your budget is tight you might consider trying to source a coach who is in training and looking for "intern clients" and might charge more modest fees. As long as you are aware of where these coaches are in their learning path, it could be worthwhile. Some of the coaching schools, listed on the ICF website, may be able to provide details on interns.

I encourage you to "hire smart" and do your homework in finding the right coach and program for you. It will be an investment that will pay off in dividends for both the near and long term

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