

HOW TO BE A LIFE COACH



by John Mason and staff of ACS Distance Education

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CREDITS

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Life coaching is a relatively new profession - although coaches have been around for a long time in the guise of trainers, instructors, managers and tutors for various professions and disciplines. Life coaching is not easily defined, but it is a type of mentoring which focuses on helping individuals to achieve what they would like to achieve and thereby to lead more fulfilling lives. Unlike other forms of coaching, it takes place outside of the workplace and is concerned with all aspects of a person's life.

Life coaches help individuals in many different areas of their life, such as:

- Debt advice
- Weight loss
- Careers counselling
- Health
- Relationships
- Self-esteem
- Practical life skills e.g. time management
- Physical wellbeing
- Physical image
- Public and professional image
- Setting goals

And so on...

ROLE OF THE LIFE COACH

Life coaches work in a variety of areas with their clients. A client may come to them because they wish to achieve weight loss, for example. They may have tried every available diet, attended slimming clubs and so on, but been unable to lose weight. So a life coach may sit them down and discuss with them how the way they are living their life is affecting their ability to lose weight. They may look at the crunch points in their day when the client eats. They may review their diet, and make suggestions on how they can fit exercise into their day.



Life coaches help individuals in many different areas of their life, such as a person's professional image.

Some life coaches may also be experts in other areas, for example, fitness. As such, they may be able to offer fitness advice along with other coaching advice. Coaches who are not experts in that area may refer them on to other professionals who can help them. For example, a life coach may work with a client on how to change their life in terms of their eating, but may also refer them to a personal trainer to help them with their fitness or a nutritionist to assess their dietary intake.



Some life coaches may be able to offer fitness advice along with other coaching advice.

IT'S NOT COUNSELLING

Life coaching can often be confused with counselling, but they are not the same thing. There is some overlap in that as a life coach you are helping a client with their difficulties, but it is not a therapy. A counsellor encourages the client to see what their problems are, and then to come to a solution that suits them - it is more problem-focused. A life coach, on the other hand, can be more directive in their approach. They may offer advice to the client and help them to set goals and targets so as to achieve what they want - it is more solution focused.

Furthermore, counsellors deal mainly with client problems which are seriously affecting their lives whereas a coach deals with things the client would like to achieve or improve. There is an assumption that life coaching clients are mentally healthy and have the intellectual capability and determination to succeed. Life coaching does not have to stop once a client has achieved a particular goal. The coach may stay with them to make sure they keep on track, and new goals may be set. Counselling usually ends once a problem or issue has been overcome.

Although life coaching is not the same as counselling, there are some similarities. Some life coaches offer assistance with milder forms of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, but only if they have the training to do this. Some psychologists who are advocates of the 'positive psychology' movement offer 'evidence-based life coaching' where they use scientifically derived principles and practices to guide their coaching.

HOW TO BECOME A LIFE COACH

How to become a life coach varies from country to country. It is possible to take courses to qualify as a life coach. Many of these are offered by coaching institutes but there are some available through government-run colleges. Some private institutions also offer coaching courses via distance education which can vary considerably in subject matter and number of hours taken to complete them.

Other people may find that they are able to use their experiences from previous jobs, such as coaching, counselling and so on, and use that to develop themselves more as a life coach. Some countries have certain requirements as to the qualifications and experience required by a life coach, whilst other countries have not yet formally stated the qualifications or experience required. To date, however, the industry remains unregulated in most countries.

If you are planning on working as a life coach, it is advisable to check in the country you intend to work in as to the requirements for that country. You should consider things such as:

- Qualifications needed
- Experience required
- Registrations with organisations required.

In order to provide the best possible service to a client, it is important to undertake a course in life coaching. People seeking a life coach will at least want to know that they have undertaken some kind of training.

NATURE & SCOPE OF LIFE COACHING

Whilst different life coaches adopt different approaches to how they deliver life coaching, the key aims of life coaching include the following:

- Helping the client to get closer to what they want to achieve and where they want to be in their life.
- Finding ways to help clients think more positively about themselves and their achievements.
- Helping clients to step out of their comfort zone and realise their full potential.

Some of the key components of life coaching are:

- Establishing a trusting relationship with a client in which they feel comfortable to openly discuss the areas of their life they would like to improve.
- Introducing the client to techniques and strategies they can use to combat self-destructive thoughts and beliefs.
- Helping the client to set goals and find ways to make positive changes in their life.
- Encouraging the client to identify success and build on it.
- Providing ongoing support to keep clients on track.

WHY PEOPLE EMPLOY A LIFE COACH

All kinds of different people from different professions and backgrounds, and from different age groups, may seek the services of a life coach. There is no specific group to whom life coaches aim their services, though some may choose to specialise in particular areas.

Generally speaking though, the types of clients attracted to having a life coach all want to improve at least one area of their life be it to change their weight, their career, to move into a new course or training, to help themselves move out of debt, or some other matter. It may not be restricted to just one aspect of their life. For instance, they may wish to get a new job but lack the job interview skills and the ability to find a new job. They don't just fancy a change, but want a new job to help themselves get out of debt. Therefore, issues can be intertwined.

Often, the potential client is someone who is already very successful in many areas of their life but they have something which has always bothered them or which they have continued to struggle with. Perhaps they don't know anyone they could turn to in their social lives to resolve this, perhaps they are too ashamed to do so. Regardless, they may wish to have the support of someone who can help them along the way to overcome this issue and experience success.

To some, what a life coach offers may seem really obvious and just common sense. People may think – “Why do I need a life coach? It's obvious what I have to do.” Well, yes, sometimes the solutions to our problems are obvious – for instance, to lose weight I know I

need to eat a healthier diet and exercise more. To reduce my debts, I need to spend less and maybe earn more.

Nevertheless, whilst it may be obvious what needs to be done, it is not always that easy to do. People can get stuck in a cycle of bad habits and poor behaviours. They can struggle to change that behaviour or they may not even realise that their behaviour is what is causing the problem. You must have heard people saying things like – “Well, I stick to the diet and I don't lose weight. I just don't know why.” When you know that they do not really stick to the diet, they continue to eat too much, or they do not exercise. You would also have come across someone who is in debt who complains that they never have enough money, but as an outsider you can see where they are spending their money.

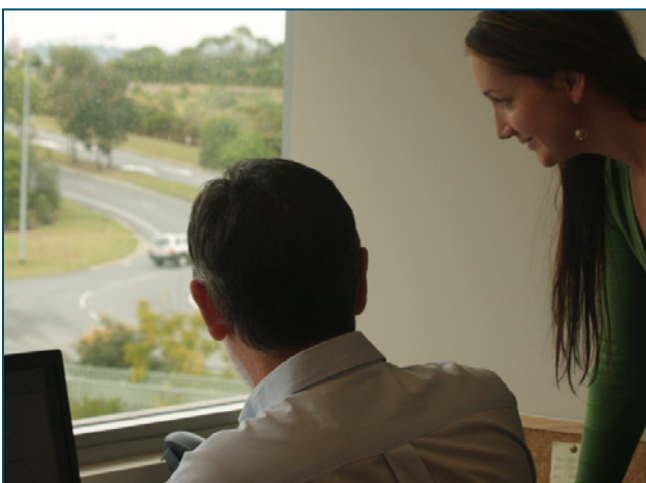


**A life coach can help
people turn away from
bad habits and poor
behaviours.**

It is a case of sometimes people cannot see the wood for the trees. They have a problem, but they are so close to it that they do not see how they are actually causing the problem themselves. A life coach can help a client to look further into their own life and see areas where they could change their behaviour and give simple ideas of HOW they could change their behaviour and change their life.

In many areas of life things seem obvious once they are shown to us, but it is not until they are shown to us that we even think of them.

Another important benefit of a life coach is that even when people know what it is they need to do to change, they may not have the motivation to make the change by themselves. A life coach can provide support and encouragement and can work with the client to develop strategies to enhance their motivation. It may even just be that people need someone to hold them accountable to do what they say they are going to.



A life coach can provide support and encouragement to their client.

WHO BECOMES A LIFE COACH?

As with the clients of life coaches, life coaches themselves come from a broad range of backgrounds. What they have in common is not only a desire to help others achieve fulfilling lives, but also a striving towards enhancing their own personal development.

Often, life coaches may have come from other areas of work. For example, they may be a fitness trainer and also want to offer life coaching as part of their repertoire. They may be a counsellor who wishes to move into life coaching, or a nutritionist who wants to do life coaching on the side. At other times, they may be someone with a lot of life experience who believes they have something to offer others.

Some life coaches prefer to coach within their area of expertise. For example, the fitness trainer may prefer to coach people with fitness-related issues. Others will seek to broaden their knowledge of other areas so they can add them to their coaching repertoire.

Some of the important skills a coach needs to have or develop are:

- Good listening skills
- Good communication skills
- Patience
- Perseverance
- Empathy
- Punctuality
- Leadership
- A good sense of humour

There are, of course, many other skills a coach may have or may need to develop. The important thing from a clients perspective is that they are able to respect their coach and build rapport and a trusting relationship with them.

PROS & CONS OF WORKING AS A LIFE COACH

Life coaching is no different to other professions in the sense that it can produce highs and lows. Some of the advantages include:

- Personal growth in different areas of life
- New challenges are fulfilling
- Rewarding to observe a client achieve their goals
- Interesting dealing with different clients and goals
- Flexible working hours
- You can be your own boss.

Some of the disadvantages include:

- Can involve unsociable hours.
- Some clients may be overly demanding.
- May take time before positive changes can be observed in clients.
- Can be disheartening if unable to work with a client.
- Some clients may become dependent.
- There may be times when you are not financially secure if you are not able to achieve a sufficient level of clients.

As a coach, you have to have the resilience and perseverance to be able to withstand the hard times and to make the most of the good times. After all, you are a mentor and, for some, a role model, and you will not be regarded highly if you are observed to be having problems yourself.



One of the positives of being a life coach is it's interesting dealing with different clients and goals.

WHO DO LIFE COACHES WORK FOR?

Well, there is no real set answer to that. Life coaches may work for themselves or for someone else.

Working for an Organisation

Occasionally life coaches may work for another organisation. They may offer coaching support to staff or clients as part of the organisation. For example, a consortium of counsellors may also have life coaches who can offer additional support to their clients.

Coaching Consultancy

There are now consultancies in many major cities who may employ one or several life coaches. These operate in much the same way as a counselling practice or psychology clinic whereby a new client is paired with a coach whose skills or training closely match the areas the client has articulated as being areas they would like to improve or change.

Other Coaching Institutions

Some life coaches can work within coaching institutions. For example, in the field of sport, athletes may have coaches who help them improve their sporting performance, but a life coach may be employed to look at other aspects of that person's life and help them in those areas. For example, a top athlete may suddenly start to lose races. Their training coach can help them to try and maintain their sporting performance, but it could be due to other issues – they are no longer interested, they have a financial crisis, they have a personal crisis at home and so on – a life coach may be better able to help them with these things.

Self-employment

Generally speaking, most life coaches are self-employed. They may work from their own home or office supporting clients. Obviously, when working as a self-employed person, the life coach also has to take account of their own accounts, administration, and marketing, whilst also being responsible for finding new clients. Some life coaches may work fulltime with clients, but others may choose to only work part-time (perhaps because they are semi-retired). Some may work as a life coach whilst still working in another job. It will really depend on the life coach and what they hope to achieve from their work.



In whichever way you choose to become a life coach, it can be a very fulfilling career.

CHAPTER 2 HOW YOU CAN HELP SOMEONE TO CHANGE

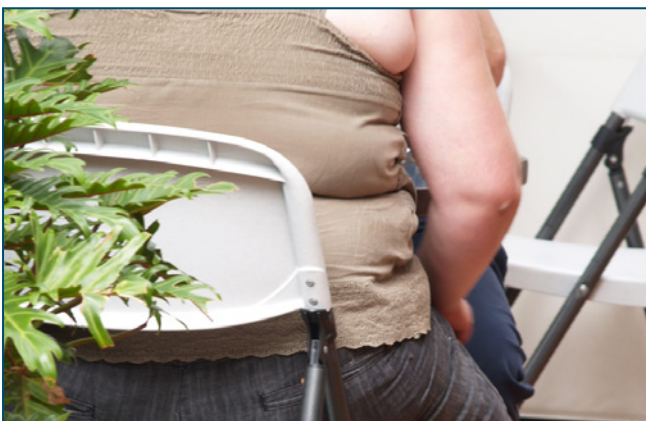
Life coaching involves bringing about positive changes in people's lives. This involves working with the client to establish what they would like to change, setting goals, and finding ways to help them to achieve those goals.

How often do you hear of people who make a New Year's Resolution only to break it minutes, hours, or days later? Change can be difficult. Anyone who works as a life coach has to appreciate that many people find it difficult to change their behaviour. Making a lasting change can be a difficult process and usually involves a substantial commitment in terms of effort, time, and emotion from the person concerned. When a person comes to a life coach, they are making that first step. They have made the effort, given up their time and possibly had conflicting thoughts and feelings in coming to see the life coach. But one meeting alone is not enough, the client must be prepared to work with the life coach towards that process of change.

TOWARDS CHANGE

When you think of life coaching, you may be thinking of clichéd reasons why a person goes to a life coach – to lose weight, stop smoking, change their career, get out of debt, perform better in interviews, and so on. There are also innumerable other variations of why people come to see a life coach. Each person has their own unique set of desires, obstacles, goals, past experiences, personalities, prejudices etc. Their reasons for changing, why they behave the way they do, and how they change will all vary. A life coach should be very wary of treating their customers in the same formulaic way. The coach must tailor their approach to meet the needs of each individual. Life coaches will therefore use different techniques as well as trial and error to support their clients.

It is during this period of trial and error, that a client can become disheartened and discouraged. They may give up on their goals. But a life coach needs to be there to support and encourage the client to continue working towards their goals. The key for helping any client to reach their goals is by encouraging them to try new techniques and find ways to stay motivated. Often, the original goals may have to be amended or changed. Sometimes simpler or fewer goals will need to be set so that they can be accomplished. Whilst it may not be clear to the client at the time,



A life coach has to appreciate that many people find it difficult to change their behaviour.

the accomplishment of these goals will combine to give them a sense of success and may provide the motivation for them to continue on and set further goals to eventually get where they want to be.

CHANGE THEORIES

Psychologists have come up with many techniques to help people change. Therapists, doctors and life coaches will use these techniques in their work. We will look at more life coaching theories shortly, but first, let us consider one of the theories – the Stages of Change model. This model recognises that change is not easy, but requires a progression through a small range of steps to reach a larger goal.

The ‘Stages of Change’ model was developed in the late 1970s by Prochaska and DiClemente as a way to help people to stop smoking.

To succeed in changing, a life coach and their client both need to understand the three main elements to changing behaviour.

- Readiness to change – do they have the knowledge and resources to make a lasting change?
- Barriers to change - what is preventing them from changing?
- Relapse – what could trigger a relapse so they return to their former behaviour?

During the early stages of the model, people may be unwilling and resistant to change, but eventually may become committed to changing their behaviour.

STAGE 1 – PRE-CONTEMPLATION

The earliest stage of the model is pre-contemplation. This is the stage where people are not considering change, where the person is almost “in denial”. They do not see that there is a problem. For example, a person may not realise they need to lose weight, or stop smoking, or change their career. The person may think they have no control over their behaviour. They may not think that their behaviour is damaging, or may be under-informed about the consequences of their behaviour.

For example, imagine a woman who is drinking a bottle of wine a night - Lana. She may be carrying on with her normal daily routine, caring for her children, seeing her friends and carrying on with her job. She may have put on a bit of weight, but is planning to go on a diet. She may not realise the damage she is doing to her body that may not be affecting her at present, but she is building up problems for the future.

At this stage, it is helpful to ask the client to consider if they think the behaviour is a problem. What they think would happen if they changed this behaviour and so on? Nevertheless, it is unlikely that a client would go to visit a life coach at this stage because they would not yet see their behaviour as a problem. However, some clients may go to a life coach at this stage if they are encouraged to by someone else. For example, Lana’s partner may be worried about her drinking and encourage her to go to a life coach to find a way to change her habits, so she may go to a coach without actually recognising that she has a problem.

So, the characteristics of this stage are:

- Ignorance that a problem exists
- Denial.

Helpful strategies a client may use to work with a client at this stage would be:

- Encouraging the client to self-analyse
- Explaining the risks of their current behaviour
- Encouraging the individual to rethink their behaviour.

STAGE 2 – CONTEMPLATION

At this stage, people become aware of the possible benefits to change. But they may also recognise that there are costs to change. This causes a conflict, which leads to a sense of ambivalence about change. Because of this ambivalence and conflict, this stage can last months or even years. For some people they may never come out of this stage. They may view change as a process of giving up something, rather than as a way to gain emotional, mental and/or physical benefits. A life coach may encourage the client to consider:

- Why do you want to change?
- What is preventing you from changing?
- What thing would help you to make the change?

If we consider Lana once again - she is drinking too much, but she may not yet see the physical and mental damage she is causing to her body. She may enjoy the relaxation she feels at having a drink. She may have a busy life -

working hard and then caring for her children. When she sits down at night, a glass or two, or three, or four, may be just what she needs to relax. She may see this as beneficial to her. The only time she can relax. She may not see why it is necessary to stop doing this.

The characteristics of this stage are:

- Conflicted emotions
- Ambivalence.

Helpful strategies to support clients dealing with this stage are:

- Encouraging them to confirm their readiness to change
- Encourage confidence in their own abilities
- Weighing up the pros and cons of changing their behaviour
- Identifying barriers to change.



A client may not see why it is necessary to stop drinking, that is where a life coach may help.

STAGE 3 – PREPARATION

At this stage, the client may be encouraged to make smaller changes to prepare for a larger change. For example, if they wish to lose weight, they may start going for walks a couple of times a week. If they wish to stop smoking, they may change to a lower tar brand. They may start reading self-help books. They may gather a lot of information to help them to change their behaviour. With Lana, the life coach may encourage her to look more into how drinking could affect her both physically and mentally, and also the potential impact it could have, or the real impact it is having on her family.

Characteristics of stage three are:

- Collecting information about change
- Experimenting with small changes.

Strategies the life coach may use:

- Write down the person's goals
- Prepare a plan of action
- List motivating statements.

STAGE 4 – ACTION

At this stage, people may begin to take direct action to accomplish their goals. However, they may fail because they have not given enough thought to what they plan to do. They may decide to lose weight, for example, and start sticking to a low calorie diet immediately without thinking about why they are overweight, behavioural changes they need to make, the best diet for them, any exercise they may need to undertake, and so on. Because they do not give enough thought to this, they will often fail or give up their new regime within days or

weeks. For example, Lana may decide to stop drinking immediately, without slowly cutting her intake. She may stop for a few days, then have a particularly bad day and go back to drinking a bottle a night.

The characteristic of this stage is:

- Taking direct action towards achieving their goal(s).

Helpful strategies would be to:

- Encourage the client to reward their successes
- To seek social support from others
- Make a list of motivating statements.

STAGE 5 – MAINTENANCE

At this stage, the client should be encouraged to avoid former negative behaviours and keep up new behaviours. The person should be encouraged and motivated to believe that they can continue to change. The client is trying to maintain a new behaviour, and they should look for ways to avoid temptation. Old habits should be replaced with more positive habits. Clients should be encouraged to reward themselves if they avoid temptation, but they should also not to be too hard on themselves if they do lapse. Lapses are common and they are making a commitment to change for the rest of their life, so they will not change in one day.

For example, Lana may decide to cut down on her drinking at first. So rather than sitting down at 8pm when the children are in bed with a glass of wine, she could think of other options to avoid temptation, for example:

- Getting an early night – going to bed at the same time as the children.
- Try a distracting technique – go for a walk, take a course, start reading a book, take an exercise class, go and do the ironing – any technique that helps. She may have more than one technique to distract her.
- She may decide to have one glass of wine after she does one hour's ironing or when she gets back from her exercise class and so on.

If she does relapse, the life coach should encourage Lana to see that one lapse is not the end of the change, but encourage her to start again with her plans. Look at what made her lapse that day. Perhaps it was a stressful day or she met a friend who drinks a lot and it encouraged her to lapse. Once the client is able to look more at what makes her lapse, the easier it will be for the client to recognise what causes problems for her.

The characteristics of maintenance are:

- Maintain a new behaviour
- Avoid Temptation.

Useful strategies in this stage are:

- Encourage the client to reward themselves for their success
- Develop strategies to deal with temptation.

STAGE 6 – RELAPSE

As we said, relapses are a common occurrence, but it can lead the client to give up, feel disappointed or frustrated. They may feel like they are a failure. The key to success is to encourage

the client not to be undermined by this relapse and recognise that they can still succeed.

We can encourage the client to look at the reasons why they lapsed, and how they can change their behaviours, their coping strategies, and ways to avoid future temptations.

The characteristic of this stage is:

- Feelings of disappointment, frustration and failure.

Strategies to deal with this are:

- Recognise triggers that lead to relapses
- Recognise barriers to success and identify steps to help overcome them
- Reaffirm the client's goals.

There are many different theories that life coaches may use to work with their clients, which we will come to shortly, but it is useful to know the 'Stages of Change' model when supporting clients.



The key to success is to encourage the client to recognise that they can still succeed.