

when is it time to find a career coach?

BY ALEXIS CASTORINA

Career coaching and professional development businesses are becoming more popular as professionals seek solutions to help them stand out in a crowded job market, refine existing skills, and explore career options. Whether you are looking for a new job or want to improve in your current role, the career coaching experience can continue to pay dividends for coachees for many years following a completed program.

What is career coaching? Is it similar to a mentorship program?

Career coaching helps individuals clarify their career goals, present themselves in the best manner in professional situations, and even search for a new job or career path, in order to attain a more satisfying career and personal life.

According to Elisabet Rodriguez, founder and president of Rodriguez and Associates, a Pittsburgh-based firm specializing in career coaching for women's advancement, career coaching and mentorship are very different. "Mentoring is an ongoing experience and relationship. It is one of teaching and learning," she says. "Coaching is more short-term. It is to address a specific issue and to correct it."

Rodriguez is actively involved in executive leadership programs for multinational companies, teaches a women's executive leadership program at Duquesne University, and is the author of *Can You Afford to Ignore Me? How to Manage Gender and Cultural Differences at Work*.



Mentoring involves networking for career development and strategic thinking. Career coaching addresses a very specific situation that, if not corrected, can derail you or prevent you from performing at your best, according to Rodriguez.

“A good example of a situation in which someone would benefit from career coaching is if a person claims, ‘People say I come off as aggressive in meetings. I want to modify my behavior so people do not perceive me as being aggressive.’”

A career coach will help you to rationalize the situation and can help provide a clear analysis of the situation or behavior you want to correct.

How do you find a career coach? What is the cost?

If there are behavioral traits that you would like to change about yourself or there is a situation at work that you would like an objective opinion on in order to help you find a solution, then a career coach may be a good investment for you.

There are thousands of career coaches across the country. Each coaching service is different. Some only focus on certain attributes in professional development. Additionally, while there is a certification process for career coaches, it is not required, and a person can present themselves as a career coach without being certified.

“CAREER COACHING HELPS INDIVIDUALS CLARIFY THEIR CAREER GOALS AND PRESENT THEMSELVES IN THE BEST MANNER IN PROFESSIONAL SITUATIONS.”

The range in price can vary according to your needs and your role within a company, but hourly rates for career coaches can range from an average of \$150 per hour to thousands of dollars per hour for very senior-level professionals and executives.

If you’re employed at a mid-sized or large organization and are interested in a career coach, a good first step is to contact your immediate supervisor and human resources department. Many companies contract with career coaching services, and if they don’t, can offer recommendations based on your goals.

What can you expect from career coaching?

“Typically when you’re working in a corporate environment, the experience lasts six to eight months,” says Rodriguez. “However, the length of time depends on why the individual sought out coaching in the first place.”

During the coaching process, the coach will provide homework and guidelines to modify the behavior of the coachee. The coachee provides their coach with examples of how they are behaving in certain circumstances. The coach will then measure progress to see how a behavior is being changed.

Rodriguez notes that the coachee must sustain a sense of awareness and be alert in order to change a behavior. “A good coach can help you stay on a very clear path, and when you’re experiencing difficulty, a safe place to go, and provide direction on how to move forward.”