



How is coaching different from consulting or therapy?

Consulting, coaching, and therapy share a lot of common ground. All three focus on helping people make changes and accomplish goals that really matter to them.

There can be a fair amount of crossover between the three. There are consultants and therapists who use coaching skills and strategies as a basic part of their practice. There are coaches who have backgrounds as consultants or therapists who integrate those skills into their coaching. However, there is a different feel and focus to each of these three disciplines. They are different ways of working, and each has its own special value.

Consulting, coaching, and therapy, when they are at their best, are complex, challenging endeavors, with a depth and richness that matches the depth and richness of the human experience. And there is a wide range of practices in all three fields. So what follows are generalizations which are intended to be indicative rather than definitive.

CONSULTING	COACHING	THERAPY
Focus is on problem-solving, action plans, strategies, and accomplishing specific, significant goals.	Focus is on learning through action. It's on the partnership between self-discovery and sustainable action. It's on the client creating a fulfilling life.	Focus is often on understanding patterns of feeling and behaviour, reliving childhood experiences, releasing feelings associated with past trauma, abuse, or loss.
Focus is on the expertise of the consultant. The consultant can make the difference between success and failure by filling a gap the client has in knowledge, skills, or experience.	Focus is on the inner guidance of the client and the process of self-discovery. The coach has the questions, the client discovers the answers.	Focus is often on the guidance of the therapist, until the client is ready to guide her own life
Solving present day problems in service of achieving desired goals for the future. Providing teaching and mentoring to develop abilities and expertise.	Future-oriented in service of making the present come alive. Focusing on the client's biggest dreams and deepest desires for her life and making them come true right now.	Past-oriented in service of freeing the client from the past—so she can choose new possibilities in the future.
Transference is not encouraged or used.	Transference is actively prevented.	Skilled use of transference as a therapeutic strategy.
Consultants sometimes ask why.	Coaches almost never ask why.	Therapists often ask why.
Does not engage in deep feeling work on childhood issues.	Does not engage in deep feeling work on childhood issues.	Focus is often on early childhood experiences and patterns.
Generally focuses on the specific project.	Focuses on the client's whole life.	Focuses on the client's whole life.
Clients are engaged in solving important problems, carrying out long-term strategic plans, building a career, an organization, or a movement.	Clients are engaging with meaningful challenges in creating the life they most want to be living. They are turning their dreams into action. They are making bigger and bigger differences in the world.	Clients often are dealing with serious and complex personal issues. They are dealing with serious pain and suffering. They are getting their lives together so they can then go after their dreams.
Consultants may do specific pieces of work for the client, or produce specific products.	The client does the work. The focus is on the client taking their own action.	The client does more and more of the work as therapy progresses.

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CONSULTING	COACHING	THERAPY
Focuses on finding the right plan of action as quickly and directly as possible.	Has an experimental spirit. Welcomes failures, and honours how the right kind of failing can be the key to success.	Focuses on getting to understanding and empowerment as soon as possible in order to help the client move out of distress.
Generally seeks to minimize resistance or find a path around it, in order to keep the focus on getting to the goal that's been agreed upon.	Welcomes resistance as a rich, juicy place for learning, and as an important, often necessary, stage in moving forward. Views resistance as transformative.	Sometimes welcomes resistance as productive and transformative. Sometimes views resistance as a problem, as something getting in the way and something to get rid of.
Is generally business-like in spirit and approach.	Has a playful, creative spirit of discovery even when it's being quite serious about tough issues.	Is generally serious in spirit and approach in line with how serious the client's issues are.
Consultants will refer people to coaches or therapists as needed.	Coaches will refer people to consultants or therapists as needed.	Therapists will refer people to coaches or consultants as needed.
Consulting can be a godsend.	Coaching can be a godsend.	Therapy can be a godsend.

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